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# SAPPHO IN LEUCADIA

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BY  
ARTHUR STRINGER  
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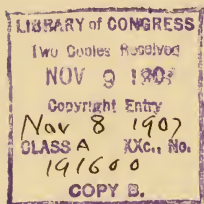
BOSTON  
LITTLE, BROWN, AND COMPANY  
1907

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1907

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COLONIAL PRESS  
*Electrotyped and Printed by C. H. Simonds & Co.  
Boston, U. S. A.*

ms. p. 309y34

# SAPPHO IN LEUCADIA

## CHARACTERS

- Sappho.*      The poetess of Lesbos. A beautiful woman, still in her youth, passionate in word and mood and action.
- Omaphale.*    A young girl of Pharos, dark and slender, simple, rustic, almost uncouth in her shrinking timidity.
- Erinna.*      }  
*Atthis.*       } Three young Lesbian women who study  
*Megara.*      } under Sappho.
- Phaon.*        A Lesbian sailor; a swarthy, high-spirited, audacious, passionate man of the sea and lover of women, in the careless prime of his youthful strength.
- Pittacus.*     Tyrant of Mytilene; lean, calm, dispassionate, ambitious; of middle age.
- Alcaeus.*      The Lesbian poet; a thin, thoughtful, stoical man; an embittered scholar of middle age, plotting against Sappho.
- Phocus.*      An idle and drunken poet of Samnos; fat and garrulous.
- Inarchus.*    An old Captain of the Guard of Pittacus; stolid, grisled, brawny.
- Hoplites, Sailors, a Soothsayer, Lesbian Men and Women.*



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# *Sappho in Leucadia*

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## ACT ONE

SCENE: *The white-rocked cliff of Leucate, on the Island of Leucadia, overlooking the Ionian Sea. It is a quiet night in early Spring, and the cliff is bathed in the clear, blue-white moonlight of the Mediterranean. On the right stands the Leucadian Temple to Apollo, showing a wall of pale marble touched here and there with gold. On the left is the curving line of the cliff-edge, with the sea beyond. Across the centre distance stretches a shadowy line of Leucadian sweet-apple grafted on quince-trees, in full bloom. Under this canopy of pale blossoms, silent and motionless, at first, sit Sappho and Phaon, watching the sea. Near by stands a bronze fire-basin, set in a block of marble, the embers within it still gently smouldering. The only sound, as the curtain goes up, is the soft and rhythmical wash of the waves on the sea-beach below, which continues in a gentle*

*undertone throughout the act. Once the curtain is up the quietness is broken by the entrance of two swarthy, slender-bodied boys, who walk slowly across the stage. One youth, trailing a shepherd's crook on his arm, blows a plaintive-noted air on a seven-piped syrinx. He stops before the cliff-edge, drops his crook, and peers below. Then he flings a stone out into the sea, waiting for the sound of its fall. The second youth continues to play on his rough wooden flute. The music he makes is the blithely sorrowful music of a contented and primitive people. The boys pass on, still playing. Sappho stirs and sighs, and raises her arms to Phaon's shoulders. On her head she wears a rope of violets woven into a chaplet. Her gown, however, is Grecian in its severity, almost plastic in its loose, full lines and statue-like lack of color. Phaon, in contrast to this, is robed in the softest of Tyrian purples above a mild Phœnician azure. Rings of beaten gold, a roughly jewelled knife-belt, and a polished bronze clasp mounted with alternating emeralds and sapphires, tend to make his figure one of almost Oriental richness.*

*Sappho*

Oh, Phaon, was the world not made for love  
On such a night? The moonbeams and the sound  
Of music and the whispering of the waves —

They seem a woman's breast that throbs and burns  
And cries for love!

*Phaon*

This is our last glad night  
On Leucate.

*Sappho*

Then lean to me again  
And say you love me as no woman, as  
No goddess clothed in glory, e'er was loved.  
Kindle and keep me burning like a flame  
Until I fall into your arms and lie  
As still as ashes. Kiss me on the mouth  
And say I am your first love and your last,  
The only love that all your life has known.

*Phaon*

Moon-white and honey-pale and delicate  
Your body seems, and yet within it burns  
A fire more fierce than Ætna's.

*He stoops above her, but she thrusts him back with a  
sudden fear.*

*Sappho*

Nay, I know  
These lips were not the first you crushed and kissed!

*Phaon*

But you — have you ne'er sung of other lips?

*Sappho (with the deep voice of utter earnestness and conviction)*

I have known Love, but never love like this!  
I have loved oft and lightly so at last  
I might love you! These other men were not  
A god to me! They were the trodden path,  
But not the Temple! They were but the key  
And not the chamber! They were but the oil  
And not the guarded lamp, the shallow tarn  
But not the mystic and impassioned Sea!  
They were the mallet, not the marbled line,  
The unconsidered sail, but not the port;  
They were the flutters of a wing unfledged,  
The footsteps of a child who scarcely dreamed  
Of this predestined race with utter Joy!  
They only served to bring me near to you,  
And on their weakness raise and throne your strength!

*She clings to him again, passionately, fiercely.*

Look, Phaon, in my eyes, and say once more  
You will not change, that you will never change!  
You are a sea-god, not a man, I think,  
So bronzed and sinewed, so unruled and fierce

And jealous of your strength, so made to crush  
And hold and battle for the thing you love!  
Oh, is it true that Aphrodite leaned  
Across your oar, that night in Mysia,  
And gave you of her ointment whereby Youth  
And Strength and Courage should be ever yours?  
Are you more beautiful than other men,  
Or do I dream these god-like graces round  
About your wilful body?

*Phaon*

Beautiful

You are, so beautiful must ever be  
Your dreams; the thoughts in your own heart  
Are hallowed with its spirit, as the Sea  
Leaves brighter color on the stones it laves!

*Sappho*

Yet men whose years are spent upon the Sea  
Inconstant live! They know as many loves  
As lands! O Phaon, love but me, but me!

*Phaon*

One land alone, the gods have now decreed,  
And but one woman! Lesbos is the land,  
And you, you, you, the woman, that I love!

Sappho and Lesbos — they shall ever seem  
The only music made by lonely waves  
Sounding on lonely shores !

*Sappho*

I am afraid,  
Sometimes I am still half afraid of joy  
So great as this. Why should I be content  
Without Erinna, Atthis, Megara,  
And all my singing children? . . . And you say  
Unhappy lovers come to this same cliff  
And leap into the Sea?

*Phaon*

And if they live  
The fires of love are quenched, 'tis held; no more  
They sigh and wait, no more their bodies burn . . .

*Sappho (peering across the cliff, with musing and mournful eyes)*

And if they die they wait and weep no more !  
O Phaon, why should we be talking here  
Of tears and sorrow ! They seem out of tune  
With languorous nights like this and love like ours !  
For I am happy, Phaon . . . All the world  
Seems over-run with rapture, as with wine.  
It makes me look and wonder, leaves me thrilled

With wordless yearnings, with some vague content  
That seems too god-like in its unconcern,  
Too rare, too exquisite, for earthly hearts !

*She turns from the Sea to the Temple and the higher  
slope of the cliff.*

Now Happiness and Leucate shall mean  
The same to me. Now all that life may bring  
Must seem a broken shadow of this month,  
This lotos-month of Love, this last soft night  
Of silence and of moonlight and of You !

*She pauses and stirs and sighs, tremulously.*

What have you done to me ! I live in dreams  
Yet walk in light. I ache and burn with bliss.  
I could reach out my arms to all the world  
And take it to my breast and sing to it, —  
Yes, sing with music that would make it young  
And leave it glad, as in its Golden Age;  
Sing as the Sea has known no throat to sing,  
Sing, sing as Night has heard no lover sing !

*Phaon*

But since you came from Lesbos there has been  
No music !

*Sappho*

No; nor need of music here!  
For lips that press on lips can ne'er lament,  
And song, Alcaeus says, is born of grief.  
You, you it was that made the throbbing lyres  
All vain and empty seem, you, you it was  
That stilled the singing voices, that dusk hour  
Amid the tangled mastic, when you bore  
Me up the cliffs in your bronzed arms and kissed  
Me on the mouth, and taught me that our mad,  
Glad, careless youth was lost, and left our world  
A world of moving shadows and of dream,  
And made me love you as I love you now —  
O Phaon, tell me you will never change!

*Phaon*

See, slow of speech I am, as all men are  
Who fare upon the ocean and have known  
Its loneliness! I scarce can say the words  
That seem to die upon my lips, and yet  
You know I love you — love you!

*Sappho (rapturously)*

Breathe those words  
A thousand times, and still some music new  
Shall throb and murmur through each uttering!



Yes; yes; I know how at our feeble lips  
The words e'er beat and flutter and fall back,  
The wings of love are held like prisoners!  
If mortals all were lovers there should be  
No music and no need of music here!  
That much this honeyed month with you, my own,  
Has taught me!

*Phaon*

Have you never dreamed of home  
And Lesbos?

*Sappho*

Only of those days when you  
And I were happy there — those golden days  
Down by the sea, those idle afternoons  
When you and I and all the world were young,  
And from the sands we watched the opal sails  
And waded out into the pale green waves,  
Wet to our golden knees. Then you would stoop  
And lift me to the wave-worn galley deck,  
Lapped by the tremulous low Lesbian surf.  
And then when evening came, back through green  
waves  
We plunged and swam with laughter, side by side!

*Phaon*

You seemed more water-nymph than woman, more  
A child of Cyprian foam than mortal flesh!

*Sappho*

And often, when you pointed out the path  
Your outbound sail would take, to Leucate,  
Past Chios and Nakaria, on and on,  
Past Myconos and Naxos, cleaving west  
Through all the flashing Cyclades, and on  
Still westward, on past Creta low and dim  
Along the southern skyline, and still on  
Past thunderous Malea, beating up  
The blue Ionian, on, until you saw  
The tall Leucadian cliffs so white and calm  
Above the azure water — then I thought  
You were indeed a god, of wind and storm,  
With all your sea-bronze and your fearless eyes.  
Round you a wonder fell, the wonder of  
Dark shores I knew not of, and day by day  
I watched for your return, and vaguely mourned  
Each wind and tide that carried you away!  
Yes, like a god you seemed in that glad youth  
Of dreamy hours and languorous afternoons  
When close beside the murmuring sea we walked.  
Then all the odorous summer ocean seemed  
A pale green field where foam one moment flowered  
Along the shallows and the golden bars,  
And then was gone, and ever came again —  
A thousand blossom-burdened Springs in one.  
A god you seemed to me, and I was more  
Than happy, and at little things we laughed!

*Phaon*

And how we plunged and splashed deep in the cool  
Green waves — like Tethys and Oceanus,  
You said it was, upon the uttermost  
Last golden rampart of the world!

*Sappho (still musingly)*

Yes . . . yes . . .

Then would we rest, and muse upon the sands,  
Heavy with dreams, and touched with some sad peace  
Born of our very weariness of joy,  
While drooped the wind and all the sea grew still,  
And unremembered trailed the idle oar,  
And no leaf moved, and hushed were all the birds,  
And on the shoals the soft low ripples lisped  
Themselves to sleep, and sails swung dreamily,  
And the azure islands floated on the air!

*Phaon*

Was't years ago, or only yesterday?

*Sappho*

Then all your body seemed a temple white  
To me, and I a seeker who could find  
No god beyond the marble, no soft voice

Beyond the carven silence — yet I kneeled  
And asked no more, and knew that I must love!  
The bloom of youth was on your sunburnt cheek,  
The streams of life sang through your violet veins,  
The midnight velvet of your tangled hair  
Lured like a cooling rill my passionate hands.  
The muscles ran and rippled on your back  
Like wind on evening waters, and your arm  
Seemed one to cherish, or as sweetly crush.  
The odor of your body sinuous  
And saturate with sun and sea-air was  
As Lesbian wine to me, and all your voice  
A pain that took me back to times unknown.  
And when you swam bare-shouldered out to sea,  
Then, then the ephemeral glory of the flesh,  
The mystic sad bewilderment of warmth  
And life amid the coldness of its world  
Was like a temple with the god restored.  
It seemed so pitiful, so fragile there,  
Poised like a sea-bird on some tumbling crest,  
Calling so faintly back across the storm,  
That one must love it as a tender flower,  
That one must guard it as a little child.  
It must have been some spirit of the Sea  
Crept through our veins in those long afternoons,  
For wave by wistful wave strange moods and dreams  
Stole over us — and then you turned and kissed  
Me on the mouth!

*Phaon (bending over her)*

. . . As I must ever do —  
But listen where some restless woman sings!

*Out of the gloom, softened by distance, sounds the voice  
of a woman, singing to a cithara. The two figures  
on the cliff are poised motionless, listening, and  
slowly a drifting cloud dims the clear blue-white  
light of the full moon.*

*The Voice sings*

When you lie in dewy sleep,  
And the night is dark and still,  
O that Voice which seems to creep  
From beyond some barrier hill!

O that sound, not wind or sea,  
From no bird or woodland blown,  
Bearing you away from me,  
Crying "One shall go alone!" —

Like a ghost that will not rest,  
Calling, calling us apart,  
Where you dream, Love, on my breast,  
Where you breathe close on my heart!

O that Cry, so far and lone,  
Mourning as the night grows old,

For the tears as yet unknown,  
For the parting still untold!

Then for nights you know not of,  
You who lie so near in sleep —  
Long I watch beside you, Love,  
Long and bitterly I weep!

*Phaon (repeating the words)*

Long I watch beside you, Love,  
Long and bitterly I weep!  
But yours this music is — it is the song  
Called "Sleep and Love!"

*Sappho*

I was a dreaming girl  
When first I wove the fancy into words —  
I scarcely knew the meaning of the mood  
I toyed so lightly with!

*Phaon*

To me it seems  
Too mournful.

*The night has been slowly turning darker. They stand outlined against the distant sea, still silver-white with the moon. A sense of awe creeps into their voices as they speak.*

*Sappho*

Yes, to-night it casts a chill  
Across my spirit. It thrusts upon my heart  
The weight of all the tears that eyes have wept  
Because of love, since first the world began.  
Felt you my body shiver? And a cloud  
Has crept across the moon! What makes the night  
Seem passion-worn and old and touched with calm,  
So suddenly?

*Phaon*

'Tis nothing but a cloud  
Across the moon's face.

*The liquid notes of a nightingale float through the night.  
Sappho starts up, raptly, listening to the bird.*

*Sappho*

Listen. . . . Like the plash  
Of water turned to music still it sounds!  
A nightingale! It is a nightingale —  
To swear the world is young again, and love  
Shall live forever. Oh, my Phaon, come  
And creep a little closer, while it sings!

*She moves slowly in the direction of the sound, Phaon  
still clinging indolently to her hand as she draws  
away.*

*Phaon*

'Twill only lure you on, and creep away  
Between the leaves, and seem an empty Voice  
Along the echoing hillside.

*Sappho*

Come, oh, come!

*She goes slowly, with intent and upturned face, walking  
heedless towards the sound as Phaon speaks again.  
It grows still darker, and the figures seem almost  
ghostly in the half-light.*

*Phaon*

Then I must burn a signal to my men,  
For I see lights on shore, new lights at sea,  
And torches moving by the outer cliff.

*He twists three handfuls of dried grass loosely together, and  
three times burns a signal from the cliff-edge, lighting  
his beacon on the smouldering urn-fire at the altar.  
The drifting flame lights up his bronzed face and  
figure. As he stands there, peering out for an answer-  
ing signal, Inarchus and a group of armed hoplites  
enter from the rear. The men carry flaring torches.  
Their armor sounds noisily through the quietness,*



*and Phaon wheels about with resentment, eyeing the intruders almost angrily, but otherwise unmoved.*

*Inarchus (with the gruff, deep-chested voice of a grizzled veteran, bluff, matter-of-fact, authoritative)*

You, there — what man are you?

*Phaon*

First tell me then

What fish are you?

*Inarchus*

Men, hold your torches close!

*They swing about, circling Phaon with light. He starts back in anger as the smoking torches flare in his face.*

*Phaon*

Stand back! Stand back there with your stinking brands,  
Or by the gods, you go across this cliff,  
And drink a tierce of brine!

*The men fall back a little, but Inarchus remains unmoved.*

What seek you here?

*Inarchus*

Is your name Phaon?

*Phaon*

Phaon once it was!

*The hoplites remain motionless, while Inarchus bends  
over a scroll of parchment, under one of the torches.*

*Inarchus*

Phaon, of Chios born, but many years  
Of Lesbos, once a ferry-man to Mysia,  
And now the master of a ship that plies  
From Lemnos down to Cyprus, and still out  
As far as Sicily, and north at times as far  
As Leucate?

*Phaon*

I am that selfsame man.

*Inarchus*

Ho, Lesbians, stand close! . . . Then you are charged  
Of seizing and of taking off, by force,  
To sea with you the girl Omaphale,  
Daughter of Rhodopus of Pharos, born  
A free-man . . .

*Phaon*

Stop! Who makes this charge?

*Inarchus (ignoring his query)*

. . . The girl

Thus seized, abducted, and betrayed, was held  
Against her will . . .

*Phaon*

What woman need I hold  
Against her will?

*Inarchus*

. . . And on your ship was forced  
To suffer . . .

*Phaon (his quick anger now aroused)*

Stop! Enough! This woman came  
Unforced and willingly!

*Inarchus (cynically)*

This shall be seen.

*Phaon*

Has she thus spoken?

*Inarchus*

She has spoken naught . . .

*Phaon*

Then who confronts me with this charge?

*Inarchus*

'Twas laid

By one in Lesbos.

*Phaon*

Not the girl herself?

*Inarchus*

By'one who is esteemed of Pittacus  
Himself, who makes the woman's cause his own!

*Phaon*

And is this man sometimes Alcaeus called?

*Inarchus*

Alcaeus, if you will.

*Phaon*

I thought as much!

*Inarchus*

The charge was laid . . .

*Phaon (passionately)*

. . . By one who learned to fawn  
Round Tyrants that have taught him not to snarl;  
By one who strums on harps and boasts how calm  
And water-cool his numbers are, yet was  
Lycimnia's, Clito's, Stheno's lover; by  
The priest of half-way passion, who is hot  
And cold by turns; by him who struts and mouths  
Of closet intrigues up and down the streets  
Of Mytilene!

*Inarchus*

Cease! For Justice mouths  
Still up and down the streets of Mytilene!  
Sir, I am of the guard of Pittacus.  
To him three witnesses have duly sworn  
You carried off this girl, while mad with wine . . .

*Phaon*

They lie, each one of them!

*Inarchus*

. . . While mad with wine,  
You seized and took this girl, the sister of  
Scylax, the youth Alcaeus schools in song.  
Hence, by the new decree of Pittacus,  
Who stands behind Alcaeus that the law

May be upheld, all crime in drunkenness  
Enacted shall be met by punishment  
Two-fold !

*Phaon*

A blow for wine, and then a blow,  
I take it, for the fall the wine compelled !  
And so Alcaeus thus resents the hand  
That holds what ne'er was his . . . and so he fights !

*Inarchus*

He stands within the law, my hot-eyed youth !  
He knows his ground, and he in Lesbos said  
You should be branded like a slave re-caught,  
Ay, dragged back unto Justice by the hair !

*Phaon's quick southern blood is now on fire, and he  
snatches out the short-bladed Lesbian sword that  
hangs at his waist. He turns on them.*

*Phaon*

Enough of this ! Who drags me by the hair ?  
Who brands me like a slave ? You lead these men,  
You seem to be the mouth-piece of this king  
In Lesbos who ordains how men shall love  
And shall not love ! I say this woman came  
To me of her free will. And you have said

That like a street-cur with a bone, I caught  
And seized and carried her away! You stand  
And cry such things! Great gods, no breathing man  
Speaks words like this to me — you hireling dog  
Of harlot-mongers, we shall fight this out!

*Inarchus*

I do not fight with brawlers of the sea,  
With every cut-throat who has smelt of pitch  
And carried off a woman!

*Phaon*

Mark you this:  
Here stands a hawser-puller you shall fight!  
Here stands an anchor-scraper who will make  
You eat your liar's oaths, or die of it!

*Inarchus (who now holds himself in with a visible effort)*

No, I am here the servant of the Law . . .

*Phaon*

Then say this woman was not seized by me,  
Or Law and you are liars!

*Inarchus*

What you seized  
Or left unseized, is not for me to say!

*Phaon*

And there again you lie. . . . You could have sought  
This woman out, and from her mouth have learned  
The truth itself. Instead of that you take  
The pay of slanderers, and nose through mire  
For money!

*Inarchus*

Check this passion, or by all  
The gods of war, your tongue shall taste my steel!

*Phaon*

I feed on steel when cowards such as you  
Hold forth a platter! Come! I love to spit  
Fat-legged defamers, pompous cavillers,  
Red-nosed deriders . . .

*Inarchus (beyond control now)*

Stop; we two shall fight;  
We two shall fight, you Fury of the Deep,  
You tunny spiced with brine! Come; we shall fight!

*Inarchus discards his heavy metal shield, and flings  
down his spear, keeping only his short-bladed Grecian  
sword. The torch-bearers fall back and range them-  
selves in a wider but regular circle about the two com-  
batants. Inarchus faces the infuriated Phaon with the  
contemptuous pity of a seasoned soldier for an unequal*



foe, with the forbearance of a misunderstood man forced into an undesired fight. Then the momentary silence is broken by the voice of Sappho, sounding clear, mellow, unexpected, out of the gloom. It is a call that is rich and low, alluring and warm. As Phaon hears it he remembers. A change creeps over him; he awakens, as from a dream, and unconsciously draws back. Then his arm slowly falls, down to his side.

*Sappho*

My Phaon, are you coming? I have found  
The thicket, and the nightingale has sung  
Of love, love, love to me, until my arms  
Are aching for you? Are you coming soon?

*Phaon*

Her voice? (*Inarchus wheels about in amazement*)

*Inarchus*

What girl is this that floats between  
The trees?

*Phaon*

It must not be! No, no; not now!

*Inarchus*

Who is this virgin lost in th' moonlight there? —  
How many women woo you, in the year?

*Phaon*

She must not know! This *can not be to-night!*  
It must not be!

*Inarchus*

How now? What must not be?

*Phaon*

I was a fool . . . I cannot fight with you!

*Inarchus*

O gods of war, what weather-cocks we are!—  
This fight you hungered for, and you shall have!

*Phaon*

No; I was blind; I must not, can not, fight!  
Oh, more in this there is than you can know;  
Yet listen, for beneath the gods I speak  
The utter truth! If I have done aught wrong  
I shall still answer for it. But this girl  
Omaphale, of her own choosing, made  
My ship her home till one short journey's end!  
It was a youthful folly, and naught else,  
A wildness of the blood, a weakness shown  
And set aright. A coast girl she had been,  
And swam out like a nereid to my prow  
When we were in the harbor. She would sit

Upon the galley's thwart and shyly laugh  
And talk with me. She month by month would watch  
For my return. Then one day when we sat  
Alone upon the deck, and her dark hair  
Fell loose about her, drying in the sun,  
A silence crept upon us, and her face  
Went suddenly white and she cried out to me:  
" Oh, I would go with you unto the ends  
Of all the world! " And when I wakened she  
Lay weeping there upon my arm!

*Inarchus*

And so?

*Sappho (from without)*

Are you not coming, Phaon?

*Phaon*

Coming — yes.

*Inarchus*

When you, good youth, have passed a further word  
Or two with me!

*Phaon*

Then quick, what would you hear?

*Inarchus*

Put up your sword! . . . I am the instrument  
And not the State you answer to. These things  
Must still be told to them who know the Law . . .

*Phaon*

They shall be told . . .

*Sappho*

What keeps you waiting there  
So late, my Phaon?

*Phaon*

'Tis a crying ewe  
Strayed from its flock! Quick, closer here. My ship  
Lies yonder in the bay. At dawn we sail  
For Lesbos. There I pledge to meet this charge  
And show it false.

*Inarchus (impatiently)*

How will you show it false?

*Phaon*

By bringing my accusers and this girl  
Together, face to face. If she then says  
That I compelled her into crime, I stand  
Prepared for punishment. Alcaeus then

Can be disposed of one who crossed his path  
More times than once. . . . Nay, send these very men  
Aboard my ship, to guard the homeward course —  
But as you are a man of justice, breathe  
No word of this mad charge to . . .

*(Sappho has entered while he speaks, and stands before  
the group, for a moment perplexed. Then she  
holds torch after torch to the immobile faces of the  
hoplites, still puzzled)*

*Sappho*

But what men

Are these?

*Phaon*

Fresh seamen, for the ship, I signalled for.

*Sappho*

Their faces all look strange. I thought I knew  
Each man among them, all who used to sing  
On deck with me the Sailors' Song to Dusk!  
They all look hard and cold. . . . And this great cliff  
Is but the rampart from which cruel Love  
Thrusts out its lost, as from the frowning walls  
Of War the dead are flung!

*She shudders and shrinks away, then starts, looks upward,  
and motions, almost imperiously, for the silent Phaon.*

But hark; there flutes  
And calls the nightingale again. . . . So come. . . .  
This is our last night, Love, on Leucate!

*She links her arm in Phaon's, and they stand listening,  
with uplifted faces swept by the clear, blue-white  
moonlight breaking through soft cloud-rifts. The  
foot-soldiers stand motionless, their torches flaring.*

*Curtain*

## ACT TWO

*An almond and olive grove above the Ægean Sea, near Mytilene, two weeks later. In the foreground is an open space, soft with turf, shadowed on the right by a row of cypresses, through which the pale marble of a headland Pharos towers and glimmers. On the left stretches the calm turquoise of the water. Violets can be seen thick along the cliff-edge, and flowers in profusion add to the coloring of the tropical background. It is late afternoon as the curtain goes up, and Alcaeus is discovered striding back and forth, lean and pale and impatient. A moment later Omaphale creeps in, looks about, and turns to Alcaeus with what is half a sob and half a gasp of disappointment. She is a slender, white-faced young girl with tragic and haunted eyes.*

*Omaphale*

He is not here?

*Alcaeus*

Did Zetes of the Guard  
Give you the message?

*Omphale (still peering about)*

Yes. . . . He is not here!

*Alcaeus*

Then what we two would speak of must be held  
In secrecy.

*Omphale*

I know . . . But where is he?  
You promised that my Phaon would be here!

*Alcaeus*

*Your* Phaon! Girl, when was this Phaon yours?

*Omphale*

I loved him, sir!

*Alcaeus*

She loved him! So, indeed,  
Have other women done, and little good  
E'er came of it. If this man could be torn  
To pieces as Actaeon, or as Pentheus was,  
And parcelled out to them he claimed to love,  
Still would there be some woman unpossessed  
Of this capricious eel, this ferry-man  
That swims in amorous tears!



*Omphale*

But you have said  
That you would bring him back to me!

*Alcaeus*

I said

That if you acted as I may ordain  
Your lover should once more be brought to you.

*Omphale*

What is it I must do?

*Alcaeus*

If still you wish  
To wed this Phaon, 'tis within the power  
Of Pittacus to make you man and wife —  
If such you ask.

*Omphale*

What must I do?

*Alcaeus*

You wish  
To make him yours, to see him bound to you?

*Omphale*

I care not if he weds me, or he comes  
And takes me quite unwed . . . if only he  
Will love me!

*Alcaeus*

Yet if wedded to this man  
You still may hold him, and you will be his  
Through every change of heart, and he must house  
And clothe and feed you, as the law commands.

*Omaphale*

As he may house and feed a hungry dog,  
And love it not! I care not for the law —  
If he will love me, that is all I ask.

*Alcaeus*

You harp on love as though it were the last  
And only thing in life!

*Omaphale*

It *is* — to me!

*Alcaeus (aside)*

It *was* — to me. But I am wiser now.  
Come closer while I speak — it must be brief.  
If still you love this man you shall be made  
His wife. To-night in Mytilene meets  
The Assembly, and its Council can decree  
That Phaon marry you, if you but swear  
That having lured you from your father's home,  
By force he took you off to sea, and there . . .

*Omphale*

This is not true!

*Alcaeus*

But truth it must be made!

*Omphale*

No, no; I went of my own will!

*Alcaeus*

Then weak

You were, and foolish!

*Omphale (softly)*

Yes . . . but happy, too!

*Alcaeus*

Why were you happy?

*Omphale*

Was I not with him?

*Alcaeus*

Then do as I have said, and you may be  
Once more with him, Swear that, against your will  
He took you out to sea — and in one day  
All Lesbos will acclaim you as his wife!

*Omphale*

And *him* — what will I be to *him*? These words  
Are not the truth! Why should I seek to hold  
His love by lies?

*Alcaeus*

You knew, and lost, his love —  
That is the final truth we two must face.  
But still the man himself comes back to you  
If you but raise a finger!

*Omphale*

Lost his love?

*Alcaeus*

Then you can keep him close; then you can guard  
His coming and his going, and ward off  
Another woman's witcheries!

*Omphale (wanly)*

Ward off  
Another woman's witcheries! . . . You mean  
He loves some other woman now?

*Alcaeus*

He loves  
Another woman.

*Omphale*

All . . . all these long months —  
Was she with him for all these endless months?

*Alcaeus*

They were together!

*Omphale (bewildered)*

And I lost his love!

*Alcaeus (bitterly)*

Then say the word, and tear him from her arms,  
And teach him what it is to feel the teeth  
Of hunger in his heart, to know the ache  
Of empty nights, the dragging days of pain  
More desolate than any Hell, the years  
Embittered, ay, the broken life that crawls  
And whines for death!

*Omphale*

*You hate this man!*

*Alcaeus (remembering himself, and reining in his fury)*

I hold him one who should be envied more  
Than Pittacus himself . . . I hate him not.

*Omphale*

From you he took this woman — 'twas from you!

*Alcaeus*

Mine she had never been!

*Omphale (remembering)*

But now is *his*!

*Alcaeus*

— Until you say the word that brings him back!  
Some one approaches . . . Quick! We must be brief.  
Will you, before the Council, make this charge?

*Omphale*

Would I against him make this charge? No; no!  
I cannot! Oh, I cannot! It would mean  
His empty body, his unanswering eyes,  
His sullen unconcern, his growing hate  
For me, his gaoler, and his greater love  
For that far happier woman still withheld!  
'Twould be like creeping to the tomb of one  
We loved and lost, and gnawing on the bones  
That once embraced us! No . . . It shall not be!

*Alcaeus*

The law itself may act ! . . . if you will not.

*Omaphale*

I cannot act against the man I love.

*Alcaeus*

Quick, Pittacus approaches; we must not  
Be seen together. Turn and walk away  
Between the olive-trees, and look not back  
Until you seem alone. And not a word  
Of what I said until you meet me here  
At nightfall.

*Omaphale (bewildered and broken)*

Phaon loves another !

*Alcaeus.*

Quick,

And think upon these things, until we meet.

*As Omaphale creeps slowly and dispiritedly away, Pittacus and Inarchus, in full armor, enter, followed by Phocus, carrying a leathern wine-sack. He is fat and blowsy, and prone to drop off into sudden sleep. Alcaeus greets the Tyrant and his Body-*

*guard, and stands beside Pittacus. Both seem lean and moody men preoccupied with their own thoughts and ends. Phocus settles himself beside a stunted olive-tree and slumbers.*

*Inarchus*

'Tis here between the Pharos and the Sea  
These women sing!

*Pittacus*

We know they sing, but *what?*

*Inarchus*

By Pluto's bones, 'tis more than I can say!  
But here, as you and Pittacus desired,  
I placed a guard, disguised as shepherd-boys;  
And honest Phocus as a swine-herd sat  
Close by and listened, since he has the gift  
Of making song, like good Alcaeus here.

*Alcaeus*

Now, by Apollo's harp, this is too much!

*Pittacus*

Then tell us what was heard.



*Inarchus*

In the cool of early day

They come with cithara and harp and lyre  
And plectrum, with outlandish instruments  
Of string and wood, inlaid with ivory,  
And some with gold, and squat between this grove  
And yonder cypresses.

*Pittacus (impatiently)*

But what was said  
Between these women? What songs were sung?

*Inarchus*

I am a rough man, sir, a son of War,  
Unschool'd in twiddling thumbs on things of gold  
And ivory. 'Twere best ask Phocus here;

*(He kicks Phocus to awaken him)*

His trade is making song! Ho, Phocus, wake.

*Phocus*

By Bacchus, now, I must have had a wink  
Of sleep! *(He yawns and stretches, lazily)*

*Inarchus*

Tell us what amorous breed o' song  
Your swine-herd ears were fed on yester-morn!

*Phocus*

What breed o' song! Song fit for one that was  
In truth a swine-herd! Sirs, such sorry stuff  
That I all but foreswore Euterpe's cause  
And turned to honest labor — for this talk  
Of Sappho and her school disgorges me!

*Alcaeus (aside)*

But, mark you, not of words!

*Phocus*

I could have shown  
Your Lesbos, ay, and Athens, what true song  
And singing is, but paugh! they'd know it not!  
This world of ours grows worse, sirs, year by year,  
And all they take to now is sham and sound!

*Pittacus (to Alcaeus)*

Oh, muffle somewhat these Mygdonian pipes!

*Phocus*

Why, song's not what I well remember it —  
There was in Samnos, when I was a boy,  
A lean old goat-herd — what a drunkard, too!

*Alcaeus (to Pittacus)*

Who died of a grape seed in the wind-pipe, sir!

*Phocus*

— Who strung, across a shark's-jaw on a box  
Of cedar dipped in beeswax, five short strings,  
And twanged them with a little brazen thumb,  
And made up songs about the early days,  
When life was worth the living, giving us  
Most wondrous music — that I mind right well!

*Pittacus*

But we are like all Greece; we still would know  
Of Sappho's singing!

*Phocus*

Sappho's singing — paugh!  
The lady, mark you, sir, I much esteem,  
And hold no quarrel with — 'tis but this stuff  
Of burning fire and brimstone, and the mouth  
Of black volcanoes boiling up with love  
That scorches half of Lesbos! I could take  
A syrinx made of willows and out-sing  
This walking cithara, if only men  
Would come and listen!

*(He drinks and settles back, as if making ready to sleep)*

*Alcaeus*

As we do, alas!

*Pittacus*

Enough of this fat wine-sack! Let me know  
What you have noted!

*Inarchus*

Sir, as I have said,  
This Sappho that you bade me watch so close  
Comes forth and talks with them, all draped in flowers,  
And schools them in the mincing of big words  
To foolish sounding music! What might pass  
Between them more I know not. But 'tis here  
They come and sit and brood above the sea,  
Like mooning cliff-birds!

*Pittacus*

Men and girls alike?

*Inarchus*

No; girls alone — grown girls — fine amorous-eyed  
Deep-bosomed women, who should love and mate  
With men like me, and bear us soldiers, sir,  
To laugh at Solon, and have Lesbos feared!

*Pittacus*

And who shall fear an island full of harps?

*Inarchus*

I am a bluff man, sir, and what it means,  
This singing of white virgins, I know not!  
But when I was a youth no girls sat down  
With girls, and strummed on wires of twisted gut

*Alcaeus*

Mark you his words! There lies the only way  
This woman can be met and overthrown!  
Since Athens crowned her for her singing here  
They wait upon her like a goddess!

*Pittacus*

True!

And for a crown of olive! Yesterday  
My chariot-wheels rang through deserted streets  
And not a slave-girl watched me as I went.  
But on the wharves all Mytilene cheered;  
The harbor rocked with roses, and the ships  
Lay smothered under blossoms, and a barge  
Of myrtle-branches and shrill-singing girls  
Went from the Western Quay, and boys swam out

Beyond the Second Bar — all, all to meet  
Her sail — the sail of Sappho coming back  
To Lesbos!

*Alcaeus*

Yet you always scoffed at Song!

*Pittacus*

And every way she turned were cries and tears,  
And every street she walked was paved with leaves  
Of oleander!

*Alcaeus*

And you scoffed at Song!

*Pittacus*

I knew no need of Song. I had my work —  
My work that led me on by paths austere  
And walked beside me with its patient eyes  
And seemed forever mirthless. Yet when life  
Grew wise and hard and empty, and the friends  
Of youth all fell away, 'twas in this friend,  
'Twas in this comrade with the quiet eyes  
And solemn brow, I found my final peace.

*Alcaeus*

And she will come and overthrow that peace  
With other friends — for she is loved of all  
Your people, and she sways them at a word!

*Pittacus*

Ay, sways them as a wine-vat sways a mob!

*Alcaeus*

But still she sways them! Should they see her go  
From Lesbos, as you threatened, at a word  
The island would take fire and rage and sweep  
With one unending "Down with Pittacus!"

*Pittacus*

I have scant fear of that! Much more I fear  
What this poor land may fall to! Think of it  
In hands like Sappho's, drugged with sighs and song!  
As well ask butterflies to fight for us,  
Ask larks to haul the iron-rimmed wheels of state!  
Too well I see it! This shall be the home  
Of weaklings; while some sturdier land unknown  
To us shall cub rough-hearted men of war,  
Men strong and ruthless, ravenous, uncouth,  
To sweep upon us with their hurrying hordes  
And grind our gentle hands and golden harps  
Beneath barbarian heels. Wine, wine I hate,  
And Sappho hate — and both shall be put down!

*Alcaeus*

You of To-morrow dream: she sings To-day! —  
I thought and sang of both, and neither won!

*Pittacus*

Ah, yes! This crown they gave her — was it not  
Once offered you?

*Alcaeus*

I sang not for the mob!  
They howled for love and wine and rhapsody;  
And to the songs I make must ever cling  
Some touch of tears and twilight. It may be  
That I, like Phocus there, was born before  
My time. So when I saw that I should stand  
Against a woman, I withdrew!

*Pittacus*

Withdrew,  
And let a Sappho win! It has been said  
You loved this woman?

*Alcaeus*

Sir, she has been loved  
By many, and because of that, perchance,  
She is as hard to combat as to win!

*Pittacus*

I fear no woman!

*Alcaeus*

Since you fought with none!  
Nay, strike not openly, but undermine



In secrecy this wall that neither you  
Nor I can ever scale.

*Pittacus*

What mean you? Speak!

*Alcaeus*

I mean it has been said this woman's wiles  
Are strange; she makes our wives forget their homes  
And young girls who have never loved awake  
And cry for tender words, and maidens, too,  
That kissed o'er close, still seek another's mouth;  
Half-mad with music, makes our women leave  
Their waiting lovers and creep after her  
With pleading eyes, and cling about her neck  
And call her beautiful and passionate names!  
And all the world has known that all her songs  
Are drenched in tumult and with rapture washed.

*Pittacus*

Nay, start me not to storming on this string  
That I have thumbed so often! She it is  
Who leads my men away, and plants their spears  
In colonnades, where rose and meadow-sweet  
May climb, and little garden-birds may chirp!  
She is the author of our idle days,  
Our festivals of folly crowned with flowers,  
Our bacchanalian midnights mad with wine

And song and reeling dance; our lovers pale  
And silent in the gloom, who neither laugh  
Nor move where gleam the white of arms  
And marbled throats and limbs voluptuous!  
Oft have I stumbled on this cyathus  
That over-runs with fire, and marked the ways  
Of those who follow her, the fearless laugh,  
The muffled stir of torches through the leaves,  
The flight, denial, capture, and the faint  
Last struggles of some lover lost in sighs  
And swooning unconcern — and through it all  
The throbbing of the lyres, the drone and beat  
Of citharas, the broken woodland chants,  
The midnight sorceries, where they who weave  
O'er-sweetened words to music sit and dream  
By drooping oleanders, flinging lust  
And enervating passion out across  
This land of lovers! Paugh, I hate it all!

*Alcaeus*

Your people should be told, then: "Here is one  
Who would corrupt the rose of Lesbian youth,  
Who leaves a blight upon our homes, a taint  
Upon our island!"

*Pittacus*

Yes; but to what end?

*Alcaeus*

That where we idle wait the gods may act!  
The seed thus planted quietly shall grow,  
Shall spread suspicion, and shall pave the way  
For grim uprootings. When the time is ripe  
Proclaim the woman for the thing she is!

*Phocus*

I must have slept a wink, and known it not!

*(He rises and quietly drinks as the sound of music and  
chanting voices floats softly up from the sea below  
them)*

*Pittacus*

Listen, what sound is that?

*Alcaeus*

It is the song  
All Lesbos sings at sunset!

*Pittacus*

All Lesbos sings?

*Alcaeus*

The Sailors' Hymn to Sunset it is called;  
From every harbor where a tired oar drips,

Or rope is tied, or weary anchor dropped,  
This selfsame music rises from the sea.

*Phocus (aside, muttering)*

That is the wide-mouthed rubble that the men  
Of this mad Lesbos take, and leave unsung  
My Shepherds' Song to She-Goats, writ by me  
In pure Æolic, in Ionic, too,  
That ripples like a rill! (*He sighs and sleeps*)

*Pittacus*

Whence came this song?

*Alcaeus*

It comes from Sappho! Listen; next to that  
They call the Song For Lovers, and its mate,  
The Sailors' Hymn to Sunrise, 'tis most sung.

*The two men turn towards the Sea, listening.*

And wonderful it is! From ship to ship,  
From cape to misty cape, from wharf to wharf,  
From harbor-town to headland and still on  
To harbor-town it rises, eve by eve.  
It mounts and swings until a chain of song  
Round Lesbos has been woven!

*Phocus stirs and wakens, rubbing his eyes. Then he  
shows that he is listening to the speakers preoccupied  
on the cliff.*

*Pittacus*

I thought as much!

This woman stands a menace and a shame —  
She must be silenced.

*Alcaeus*

Then, before I go,  
Let me one sentence add: 'Twere best to strike  
At her through Phaon — cut the cypress low,  
And let the ivy wither, where it lies.  
Of Phaon's deeds you know: should he go down,  
Her desperate love for him would spell her own  
Untimely ruin. Let them fall as one!

*Pittacus*

She has her following, such as it is!  
We must strike cautiously. This Phaon boasts  
That he has talked with goddesses, you say?

*Alcaeus*

He is the man who claims Poseidon speaks  
With him across his gunwale. Still he tells  
How on a night of storm and rain he found  
A woman muffled in a gloomy cloak,  
Waiting without a word beside his boat —  
Who made a sign, whereat he rowed her out,

Against his will, into the driving spray.  
And all the while her woman's dreaming eyes  
Shone out like stars, and through the tempest flashed  
Her white face like a flame, and filled his heart  
With fear and wonder. And they reached the land;  
And she passed silently out through the night,  
And left no sign or footprint on the sand;  
And he has claimed she was a goddess.

*Pittacus (cynically)*

He

May need her help!

*Alcaeus*

We boast no goddesses  
To fight for us, in either love or war;  
So we must stand prepared, and wait our hour . . .

*Pittacus*

And when the time is ripe . . .

*Alcaeus*

The gods may act  
Where we have been most idle. I must go!

*(Exit)*

*Phocus (peering blearily after Alcaeus)*

Now, by the horn of Bacchus, here will be  
Eryngo-root to spice to-morrow's talk! (*He laughs*)  
But soft — there's one as lean as I am fat.

*Omphale creeps in, as he speaks. Her face is colorless, her hair dishevelled. She is about to speak to Pittacus, but shrinks away, with a gesture of fear and despair. A look of hopelessness is on her face, as she advances toward the cliff-edge.*

*Pittacus (wrapt in thought, unconscious of Inarchus standing so close beside him, in the statue-like immobility of the long-trained soldier)*

The gods may act. . . . And out of hate and love,  
Entangled and embattled, she may fall,  
As others fell! (*He sees Omphale*)

And there, I take it, walks  
One of her Maenad band, chalk-faced and frail  
And rapt of eye, a Bassarid grown sick  
Of too much love!

*Inarchus*

It is Omphale!

*Pittacus*

Omphale! For something lost she seeks!

*Inarchus*

What seek you, girl?

*Omaphale (abstractedly)*

The Sea!

*Inarchus (bluntly)*

For Phaon's ship?

*Omaphale*

He has been taken from me. . . . No, the Sea  
Is all they left me. . . . 'Tis the only way!

*She shudders and draws back, as she peers from the verge.*

But oh, I cannot do it! I am weak!  
The water is so far! The wheeling birds  
Still make me dizzy! Oh, it is too hard!

*She lowers her hands, looks up at the sky, the cliff, the  
sea, gazing slowly about her. Then she closes her  
eyes, and gropes brokenly toward the sea, her hands  
once more out-stretched.*

But now, it must be done!

*She is on the very verge when Inarchus seizes her. She  
struggles fiercely as he drags her back.*

Oh, let me go!

I only ask to die — that, that is all!



*Phocus*

The girl would kill herself !

*Oma phale (struggling )*

I want to die!

*Pittacus*

What is this madness, girl? (*She is silent*)

What is your name?

And why should one so young fight bitterly

To go to such a death !

*Phocus (sadly)*

She has been crossed

In love, as I in Samnos once was crossed !

*Oma phale, wild-eyed and dumb, gazes at them. She  
breaks away, but is caught by Inarchus.*

*Inarchus*

What shall I do with her?

*Pittacus*

The girl is weak;

She shakes and quivers like a captured bird !

We may have been too rough ! Some woman's hand  
Should hold her, and a woman's comrade voice  
Should question with her softly ! Tell me, girl,  
What happened you ?

*Phocus*

Ho, here are women now !  
Quick, call them you. From *me* they might construe  
One word as an advance, and hold me to it !

*Erinna, Atthis and Megara, crowned with flowers, have  
entered while he speaks. They carry musical  
instruments.*

*Erinna (dropping her cithara)*

What has this woman done, to be so held ?

*Inarchus*

Just what she did I know not, but I think  
She must be mad, for she would throw herself  
From off the cliff !

*Erinna*

Why, she is but a girl !

*Omphale turns away, with still another effort to reach  
the cliff-edge.*

O Atthis, hasten by the Shepherd's Path, and call  
To Sappho !

*Exit Atthis*

*Phocus*

Why call for Sappho?

*Erinna*

Knows she not

The most assuaging words, the softest tones,  
To utter to a heart that sorrows wring?

*Phocus*

What, Sapphic music at a time like this!  
The girl wants wine, good wine, to warm her blood  
And make her spirits dance!

*He offers her his wine-flask, but the girl turns away,  
still silent.*

The girl is mad!

*He offers it again.*

There is no question but the girl is mad!

*He drinks, deeply, and replaces flask, with lips smacking.*

*Erinna*

Oh, see if Sappho comes.

*Megara*

'Tis Atthis calls.

She answers; yes, 'tis Sappho.

*Atthis (entering, breathless)*

She is here.

*They step back. Sappho enters with an armful of golden samphire, and a lyre of silver and gilded cedar-wood. She looks from face to face. There is a suggestion of power, of imperiousness, in her bearing.*

*Sappho*

Why have you called me, Atthis? Was it you,  
Erinna?

*Erinna*

Yes, 'twas I.

*Sappho, whose eyes had met those of Pittacus, in a steady, combative gaze, now sees Inarchus and his captive for the first time.*

*Sappho*

What girl is this,  
And why is she held thus, a prisoner!

*Phocus*

Here is a girl, stark mad, who wants to die —  
And so all Lesbos bellows out for you!

*Sappho*

For me? But why for me?

*Phocus (mincingly)*

She has a wound  
That begs the oil of Sapphic song! She needs  
A chain of golden music round her thrown,  
To charm her back to life. Thus have I seen  
Phœnician jugglers pipe and soothe an asp  
To sleep most beautiful! So, since she will  
Not drink of wine, let music do its worst!

*Sappho*

Peace, peace; this girl is shaking like a leaf,  
She has been tortured by more things than fear!  
Why, child, look up at me! You are too young  
To know what sorrow is! These eyes are still  
Too soft to peer into the awful Night  
That never answers us, and never ends!

*Sappho kneels and takes the girl's hands, with a sign for  
Inarchus to release her. Inarchus glances at Pittacus.  
The latter nods, as if in assent. Inarchus holds the  
girl by only one arm.*

*Phocus*

Now, by Astarte's eyes, here stands a test!  
Here is the first, so called, most eloquent  
Of Lesbian singers with a pretty task:

To medicine a grief, to make this girl  
Content with life, as wine might do for me!

(*He drinks*)

*Pittacus*

You, Sappho, you forever sing of life  
And of its joys. Let, then, your lyric gift  
Lure back to love of life this broken girl  
— Ay, let it stand a test, as Phocus says!

*Sappho*

I seek no triumph, I should ask no test  
At such a time! For even Pittacus  
I could not toy upon a wounded heart!

*Pittacus*

But you will talk with her, will plead with her?

*Sappho*

As I would plead with any troubled soul!  
Release the maiden — she will not escape.  
Why, you are nothing but a girl!

*Sappho holds the girl's face between her hands, gazing  
into it. Then she continues to speak, gradually  
growing oblivious of those about her.*

All life

Should mean so much to one who still has youth!  
These saddened lips were made for happiness

And tender words and kisses touched with fire!  
Such eyes as these should never mournful seem!  
What sorrow is it makes them swim with tears  
And shakes your slender body? Speak to me  
What is it that has made all life so dark?

*Omphale*

No longer, now, he loves me.

*Sappho*

Tell me more.

*Omphale*

His love is dead, and I must die with it.

*Sappho*

No, no; think not because some foolish word  
Has passed between you —

*Omphale*

Dead, his love is dead;

He is another's now!

*Sappho*

But love is love;  
Although the torch may fall, the sacred fire  
Endures and burns; the broken dream comes back;

The voices of the Spring may pass away,  
But other Springs shall bear another song  
And life shall know some newer love!

*Phocus (aside)*

Now, by the horn of Bacchus, here is Song  
Put into use!

*Sappho*

Nay, speak to me!

*Omphale*

He loves

Another! Let me die! . . .

*Sappho (pleadingly, softly)*

. . . And say farewell  
To light and warmth and greenness, and go down  
To some grey world of ghosts you know not of!  
Think, think, what life still means . . . think of the joy  
Of breathing in such beauty, dusk and dawn,  
Moonbeam and starlight, sun and wind and sea,  
The marbled cities and the silences,  
The sting and sweep of the storm on night of rain,  
The wild surf and the brine-smell and the ship  
That brings the heart we love, the tangle old



Of tears and laughter, rapture and regret,  
The sheer glad careless god-like going-on  
From day to golden day, the grapeless wine  
Of music, dreaming music, to upbuild  
Ethereal homes for us when we have tired  
Of too much joy, the throats of song to lift  
Us out of loneliness and give our tears  
A touch of beauty, and the last great gift,  
The gift of Love, that makes death pitiful,  
And paves the world with wonder!

*Oma phale*

## All I asked

Was that he love me — and he loves me not!

*Pittacus (aside to Inarchus)*

Behold where Phaon comes, mark well each word  
That passes here between the two !

*Enter Phaon, who stands unnoticed on the outskirts of the preoccupied group.*

*Sappho*

Tell me

The name of him who has forgotten you!

*Omphale*

I cannot tell !

*Sappho*

Say where he may be found.

*Omphale shakes her head, obdurately. Sappho still looks at her silent face, in wonder.*

Then you can hate him not? You love him still?  
Could you not steal unto his couch and plunge  
A knife into his sleeping heart? And she,  
The one who came between you — would you kill  
This cruel woman with her careless smiles?

*Omphale*

I love this man so much that I would die  
To see him happy!

*Sappho*

But what man is this  
Who merits such mad love?

*Omphale (looking away and seeing Phaon, in one involuntary scream)*

Phaon!

*Sappho*

Why Phaon? What is Phaon unto you?

*Omphale*

O Phaon, tell them that you were, you are,  
The man I loved . . . tell them!

*Sappho (pointing to Phaon)*

Know you this man?

*Pittacus*

Come, answer quickly, child!

*Sappho*

Know you this man?

*Enter Alcaeus, who watches silent and uneasy.*

*Omaphale*

He was — no, no; this means some woe  
I cannot understand. What makes your face  
So white? You shrink and quiver and your eyes  
Are like dead women's eyes! This means some harm  
To him! No, no, *I never knew this man!*

*Pittacus*

You knew him not?

*Omaphale (the falsehood only too obvious)*

No! No! I knew him not!

*(To Alcaeus)* You, you can tell them he is innocent!

*She starts towards Phaon with outstretched hands, but is  
held back by the stolid Inarchus.*

*Alcaeus*

The girl is lying.

*Sappho*

Lying?

*Alcaeus*

Yes; she says

These words to shield the man.

*Sappho*

What man? What man?

*Pittacus*

What man would hide and skulk and wait behind  
A woman's lie?

*Alcaeus*

The man who took this girl  
And loved her till she grew a weariness  
To him, the man who bore her off to sea  
Against her will, and found in other lands  
Another lover . . .

*Sappho*

Then his name! His name!

*Alcaeus*

His name is Phaon.

*Omphale*

No — he took me not  
Against my will. I loved him, and I went.

*Phaon*

The woman speaks the truth! I skulk behind  
No lies; and you, my sweet Alcaeus, you  
Shall answer for this thing, or —

*Pittacus*

Silence!

*Sappho (starting back, shaking)*

So,  
This is the truth! — And this the man I sought!

*Phaon (to Alcaeus)*

Oh, you, you half-way lover of women, you  
Shall answer for these lies — you Janus-face!

*Omaphale (weeping before Pittacus)*

We went as lovers, sir, as happy lovers!

*Sappho*

This is the truth, indeed, the woman speaks!  
Oh, this is more than I can bear! They went  
As lovers, till he looked about and found  
Another lover from another land!

*Phocus (wagging his head)*

If you would shake the tree, then must you sort  
The fruit!

*Omphale*

Will you forgive me, Phaon?

*Sappho*

Go —

Go to your lover! Go, I give him back  
To you! Go there into his arms again!  
He waits for you — he is impatient, see!

*Phaon*

Stop — this is mockery!

*Sappho*

See, I have sung  
You back upon his breast. Look, I have saved  
You from the Sea, that you may kiss his mouth!  
Yes! Yes! I, I have saved you for this man!  
With words as soft as first-born love I brought  
You back to him! Most bravely, was it not,  
Great Pittacus, I cooed and pleaded here,  
I sounded like a gymnast of the wires,  
The glory and the wonder of all life! —  
But I shall wring your State with no more song,  
And I shall mouth no more, and plead no more!

*She flings her harp flashing and twirling into the Ægean.*

This is the end of love! This is the end  
Of faith in man, in life, in every god  
That mocks your temples!

*Phocus (aside)*

Ætna, to a turn!

*Erinna (weeping)*

O Sappho, come away!

*Atthis*

Oh, come with us!

*Sappho*

Yes, I will come with you; the ghost of me  
Will walk and talk with you — but I am dead!  
This man has killed all life, all love, in me,  
All happiness, all music, and all song!

*Phaon*

Nay, hear me, but a word . . .

*Sappho*

Wait, I shall speak!

Alcaeus, Phocus, you have wooed me both —

Sought me for many years, and day and night  
Sighed after me! Behold, I am for sale,  
For sale to him who takes me where I stand!  
I, Sappho, Queen of Song, ay, Queen of Love,  
The Tenth Muse after whom the others walk,  
Am I not worth the taking, one of you?

*Alcaeus (his lean face blanching at her words)*

And you will hold to this?

*Sappho*

I hold to it!

I hold to anything that crushes him  
That I have learned to hate! You fear this man?  
Are both of you afraid?

*Phocus*

Now, by the horn  
Of Bacchus, lady, I did love you well —  
But weeping for it left me scant o' breath!

*Phaon, who has snatched out his sword, now turns on  
the more dangerous and determined Alcaeus.*

*Phaon*

I care not who he is, but by the gods  
Of seamen I will spit the first rash fool  
Who listens to this woman!



*Sappho*

One of you,  
Which one of you will take me where I stand?

*Phaon*

Who does so, first must taste this bitter steel!

*Alcaeus (aside to Phaon)*

This is no place for brawling!

*Phaon (desperately)*

What, you still  
Would woo your old-time love?

*Alcaeus*

I stand unarmed —  
And thank your gods for it! But meet me here  
At dawn, and you and I shall fight this out,  
And I shall kill you!

*Phaon*

Kill me! I could mow  
My way through fields of music-tinkler's throats,  
Dig through a mountain made of poet's hearts,  
Ay, swim and bathe in chorus-monger's blood,  
And face a dithyrambic sea of all  
The lean-gilled singers that have harped through Greece!

*Sappho (distraught)*

Kill him, Alcaeus, for he killed my joy  
In life; he killed my hope of happiness;  
He killed my new and tender love . . . he killed  
The careless singing voices of my heart! . . .  
Oh, kill him . . . kill him . . . as he killed my soul!

*White with fury, she rends and tears her robes, and sinks  
back exhausted from her frenzy as the curtain falls.*

*Curtain.*

## ACT THREE

SCENE: *the same as in Act II, early the next morning.*

*Erinna and Atthis, white and worn with watching,  
face the sea.*

*Erinna*

See, Atthis, it is morning!

*Atthis*

What a night

Of sorrow!

*Erinna*

Like a child she wept and cried  
For Phaon, and then paced the echoing gloom,  
And asked if it were cruel thus to kill  
The man who made her suffer! Then her wrath  
Broke forth again, and down on him she called  
The curses of the gods, then calmer grew,  
And fell to weeping.

*Atthis*

I have sometimes thought  
Her love was like her music when she sang

To us at midnight. 'Tis o'er passionate,  
And seems as deep as life, as dark as death,  
And wild beyond all words! In this our world  
There are two kinds of women: one men seek  
And desperately love, and some day leave,  
Or some day meet their death for; likewise one  
They seek not drunkenly, and yet when known,  
They labor for, and cleave to, all their years,  
And fight back from the world's end to rejoin.  
The eternal mother calm of brow, the one,  
And one, the eternal lover!

*Erinna*

Sappho has  
The strength and fire of each! I love her so  
I could not see her faults.

*Atthis*

She asks too much,  
And ever gives too much. She is of those  
Who threaten when they most alluring seem,  
Who menace even when they yield the most.  
Volcanic are such women: that same fire  
Which makes them dangerous and dark and cruel  
Still leaves them warm and rich and bountiful,  
And Love creeps closer, presses ever up,  
Up to the central fires, and mile by mile  
The soft audacious green of vineyard dares

The dreaming crater. Then the outbreak comes,  
And through the red-lipped lava and the ruin  
The world remembers!

*Erinna*

Nay, you do her wrong.  
She bleeds when she is wounded, but her ways  
Are soft and gentle. Midnight scarce had gone  
Ere she grew calm and sought Alcaeus out.  
And called him from his home, and through the gloom  
Of his walled garden pleaded that he would  
Be merciful to Phaon.

*Atthis*

He, merciful!

*Erinna*

Alcaeus said that honor bade him meet  
The man who challenged him, yet gave his word,  
His cryptic word, that Phaon should not die,  
If she but yielded him the little ring  
Of beaten gold she wore upon her wrist!

*Atthis*

I fear this self-contained and watchful man,  
Whose words are but a sheath to hide his thoughts.

*Erinna*

I, too, I fear the outcome of it all!

*Atthis*

If Sappho were but here!

*Erinna (looking about)*

And Phocus, too —

He should have come to us, an hour ago!  
When once her woman's rage has burned away,  
She will go back to Phaon, for such love  
As she has known can wither not and die  
In one short night.

*Atthis*

If only Pittacus  
Would come to Sappho's aid!

*Erinna*

Not Pittacus!

Nay, Pittacus is hard and granite cold,  
His breast is adamant, his hand is steel,  
And he has dreamed that while this land endures  
His name and that of Lesbos shall be linked!  
He wills that on each temple "Pittacus"  
Shall be inscribed in letters all of gold;  
And bitter in his mouth has been the praise

Of Sappho; he has grown to hate her name,  
Yet fears to act. But he may make this night  
A pretext . . . See, 'tis Phocus come at last.

*Enter Phocus, panting*

*Phocus*

Ho, what a climb! Had I not stumbled on  
A snoring herdsman with a wine-sack full  
Of better life than his, I should be prone  
Beside the City Wall! Oh, what a climb!

*Erinna*

But quick, what news?

*Phocus*

News? News enough to swamp  
A galley! Pittacus is on his way;  
Alcaeus by the herd-path also comes,  
And Mytilene crowds upon the heels  
Of Sappho, caterwauling ribald song,  
And growling curses back upon the Guard!  
And Phaon, it is said, was put in arms,  
And then again was not, and still again  
'Tis held he was deported in the night,  
And still, once more, again, that Pittacus  
Has issued mandates there shall be no fight —

While others whisper Phaon hurries forth  
To meet Alcaeus and fight out his fight  
Before 'tis known of!

*Erinna (at the sound of singing)*

Listen! Hear you not? —  
The Sailor's Hymn to Sunrise?

*Atthis*

Yes, I hear!

*Phocus*

But I have further tidings! First, a sip  
O' herdsman's comfort! — Pittacus, 'tis said,  
Commands these men must neither meet nor fight.  
He knows his words are useless — mark you that! —  
But purposes to wait, and make no move  
Till this fine-feathered, anchor-fouling, swart,  
Hot-headed son o' brine called Phaon comes,  
As he will surely come, and bleats and yawls  
For clash o' swords. Thereat the waiting Guard  
Shall clap him into irons; the charge to be  
Attempt at murder on a citizen,  
The penalty whereof, and mark you this,  
Is exile!

*Erinna*

Atthis, I must go at once  
And seek out Sappho: she must know of this!



*Phocus*

Nay, wait till I unload! 'Tis whispered round  
That yester-night the Council secretly  
Decreed that Phaon and Omaphale  
Should in the streets be married, publicly!  
Now, once in Samnos . . .

*Erinna (to Atthis)*

Wait on my return!

*Exit Erinna**Phocus (swelling with importance)*

And mark you this: the less your Sappho says  
Concerning what has been, or is to be,  
The better with you all! For Pittacus  
And lean Alcaeus tooth and nail are set  
On her undoing. Mark you that again!

*Atthis*

It shall not be. No; she and happiness  
Must walk together. She must live to sing  
And make life beautiful with music still!

*Phocus*

To sing? Ay, there's the long and short of it!  
(*He drinks from his flagon*)

What song is there in these besotted days?  
A life most scandalous, and then a trick  
O' mouthing vowels, then a wanton youth  
And green-sick maid or two to syllable  
Your milk-and-water sorrows, warble out  
Your lecherous odes, and, ho, you have a poet!

*Atthis*

A poet who is fat and full of words!

*Phocus (swaggering)*

Now Pittacus has told me, man to man,  
When seeking of my counsel, that our tunes  
Have turned too amorous, and must be stopped.  
And I'm behind him in it! You talk of song,  
But once in Samnos was a lean old man  
Who strung across a shark's jaw on a box —

*Atthis*

See, see; they come . . . And Sappho is not here!

*Enter Alcaeus, armed, attended by only a young servant.*

*Alcaeus*

He is not here, this man that vowed to face  
A sea of liliated singers.

## Phocus

Fear you not!

This hot-eyed tunny out of Pluto's ditch  
Is foaming, lashing, frothing hitherward  
Along the Shepherd's Path (*The sun rises*)  
. . . And as he swore  
He breaks upon us with the rising sun.

*Enter Phaon, followed by a handful of Lesbian sailors; sunburned, graceful, light-hearted fellows, but now watchful and furtive-eyed.*

## Phaon

At dawn it was to be. Well, it is dawn.

*He whips out his sword, almost gaily, tries its edge on his thumb, and wheels about. Alcaeus, nervous and unstable, not yet sure of his ends, faces his opponent.*

*Alcaeus*

One word, before this fight begins . . .

## Phaon

Words! Words!

I want no words! My life to-day is worth  
A minnow's ransom! There's a narrative  
In naked steel comes nearer to my wish  
Than words!

*Alcaeus*

But things there are that we must say  
By word of mouth. Still let judicial steel . . .

*Phaon (shortly)*

These words, then, if you must: I have been told  
We two are destined not to fight this fight;  
That one who much esteems you will step in  
And stop this combat, as you stand informed!

*Alcaeus*

This is not true!

*Phaon (determined)*

Then show it to be false!  
Quick! I shall brook no quibble or delay!  
Fight! Fight, I charge you! Quick, defend yourself!

*Alcaeus (aside to servant)*

The Guard! What keeps the Guard!  
(*To Phaon*) But I would know  
For what we two are fighting here?

*Phaon*

For what?

You know full well — a woman!

*Alcaeus*

Then, we fight  
For issues closed! This woman came to me.

*Phaon*

To you? So soon? Within a night?

*Alcaeus*

Within

A night, since you have said it!

*Phaon*

Liar; still

You swim in lies!

*Alcaeus*

And gave this band of gold  
To be a token — Look well over it!

*Phaon looks at the wrist-band, incredulous; Alcaeus,  
thus gaining time, peers out anxiously, awaiting  
Pittacus and the Guards.*

*Phaon (quivering)*

Ha! Now; yes, now we fight; we doubly need  
To know which man must die! We doubly need  
To know how stand the gods, if this be true!  
No more of empty words! Come, fight it out!

*Alcaeus, about to expostulate, finds no time for words. Phaon, advancing, compels him to fight. The crowd draws closer, in an irregular circle, with groans and cheers as the short-bladed swords clash and strike. Foot by foot Alcaeus is forced back. It is obvious that Phaon is driving him towards the cliff-edge. He is foiled in this by the sudden entrance of Pittacus, breathless, followed by his Guard. The huge Inarchus strikes down the sword of Alcaeus, who is already cut on the arm. Phaon, seized from behind, still slashes with his sword.*

*Pittacus*

What brawl is this that stains our Lesbian peace?

*A Voice*

A fight for a woman!

*Another Voice*

Let them fight it out!

*A Citizen*

'Twas Phaon forced him to it!

*A Sailor*

Fight it out!

*A Citizen*

He fell upon him !

*A Citizen*

Ay, he up with sword  
And at him like a Fury ! Have it out !

*A Sailor*

They fight in honest combat ! Have it out !

*A Citizen*

Alcaeus was compelled to draw !

*A Sailor*

You lie ;

He came at dawn to meet this man.

*Pittacus*

Be still !

Who sought a Lesbian's life shall pay for it.  
Guards, put this man in chains, and hold him close.

*The hoplites seize and manacle the struggling Phaon.*

*The sailors crowd close, but dare not interfere.*

*Pittacus (aside to Alcaeus)*

The gods have acted . . . With my second blow  
We shall be masters ! And this man you hate  
Will go from Lesbos stained in thought and name.

*Alcaeus*

Omaphale — you hold her close?

*Pittacus*

We hold  
Her close, assuredly. The girl must stand  
The column of our acts. This Sappho heads  
An army without arms, that secretly  
Opposes, threatens, thwarts me. Here, to-day,  
It shall be brought to issue. We shall learn  
What hand rules Lesbos still — and more there is  
In this, than but a foolish woman's fall!

*Alcaeus*

Then, I were best away.

*Pittacus*

Go, have your wound  
Attended, for excuse. (*Aloud*) But, stop; were you  
Assaulted by this man?

*Alcaeus (showing wounded arm)*

This speaks for me!

*Sappho enters, panting, her face pale. She is followed  
by Erinna and a group of Lesbians, bearing sickles and  
grape-knives.*



*Pittacus*

Assault it was.

*Sappho (authoritatively. Her gaze has been on Phaon)*

Why is this man in chains?

*Pittacus*

He broke a law of Lesbos.

*Sappho (tauntingly)*

Did he drink

A sip of wine? Or sing a happy chord  
Of shepherd music?

*Phocus*

Shepherd music! Oh!

Oh! Shepherd music! That was good! 'Twas more  
Like spouting sulphur crowned with Typhon's fire!

*Pittacus (judicially, realizing the people before him must  
be convinced of the justness of his action)*

This man defied the State and broke the peace  
Of Lesbos, and must suffer. I have sought  
To make this island one of temperate ways,  
And late and early I have strained and toiled  
To reach this end. Its wastrel years have left  
Its name a by-word on the lips of Greece,

And not until its must-vats are no more,  
And all its vaults of flagoned indolence  
Are emptied, and its vineyards are destroyed,  
And all its simpering harps made into swords,  
Shall we dare hope to be a State again!

*Sappho (defiantly)*

Then, it is worse to crush a thousand grapes,  
O, man of war, than twice a thousand lives?  
Quick, Phocus, give me of your wine to drink  
To one who knows his Lesbos! That puts blood,  
Good Lesbian blood, in me! Yet we had thought  
'Twas Bacchus who once called this island "home,"  
And blessed our vines! We thought Methymna saw  
The harp of Orpheus float to Lesbian shores,  
The god's own head washed high upon our sands —  
And from the dead mouth sounds of music creep  
And crown our island with its gift of song!

*The Lesbians*

That is the truth!

*Shepherds*

Our Sappho speaks the truth!

*Sappho*

Rail not at wine! When Athens threatened us,  
And sentineled our shores, and sail by sail

Shut off the Sea, and flung our ramparts down  
And left us huddled close, without defence,  
And all our cattle died for want of rain,  
And drought drove all our people from the hills,  
And Lesbos had no water, none to lave  
The dying, none to give unto the sick,  
And none to mix the waiting lime and sand  
Whereof to build a wall against the foe —  
Mark you the tale — 'twas from the sunburnt hills  
Our fathers tore the abundant grapes, and crushed  
The precious liquor from them, vat by vat,  
And mixed their mortar, and threw up their walls  
And fought the Athenians back into the Sea!  
Nay, rail no more at wine, chaste Pittacus!

*The Lesbians*

And that is truth! Still Sappho speaks the truth!

*Pittacus*

To-morrow, then, shall turn it to a lie!

*Sappho*

My people, listen close! This man of war,  
This man who walks in steel and sleeps in stone,  
While we are ramparted by rustling leaves  
And love and careless flowers, this same man  
Who would make fortresses of garden walls,  
And grape-fields into flashing battlegrounds,

Who would turn amphora and urn and bowl  
To sword and pike and helmet — he would leave  
Our towns no longer thronging-masted marts,  
But tankards of dissension and of blood!  
He would upon the lamb drape lion-skins,  
And have us known for what we can not be!

*Pittacus*

No — have us known *not* as we now are known!

*Sappho*

He to the kilns would fling our carven fauns  
And to the fire our stately marbles give —  
Our chiselled dreams that cannot draw a sword,  
Our Parian mutes that may not bear a pike! —  
And make them into lime for arsenal walls,  
And school us how to loathe a purple grape!  
Wine — Wine! This island sings on, floats on, wine!  
Wine roofs our homes, and feeds our hungry mouths;  
Our galleys freight it to the thirsty world,  
It makes the sorrowful no longer sad;  
It leaves pain unremembered, makes us seem  
The equal of the gods; the aged, young;  
The sickly, well; the silent, full of song;  
The parted lover grieve not for his love!  
It is a secret god who stoops to make  
Us rich with music!

*Phocus (aside)*

Now, by the horn, her words  
At last are wisdom !

*Pittacus*

Stop, enough of this !  
There shall be parted lovers that no wine  
May comfort . . . Let the prisoner stand forth.

*Sappho (desperately — in a mad torrent of defiance)*

And this is wisdom, this the heart and core  
Of that calm highest fruitage that you flaunt  
Upon your thought-fed tree of knowledge ! Oh,  
It maddens me ! These icy grandeurs make  
Me like a Mænad, make me storm and rage  
And wonder how the ruddy blood of life  
Could run so slow and pale ! You never laugh  
And never weep, men say. . . . You never know  
The meaning and the glory of the morn,  
The passion and the pathos of the dusk,  
The rapture and the wonder of all life !  
You are a burnt-out kiln, a river-bed  
Of aching emptiness, a dried-up vat,  
A hearth without a fire, a thing of bones !  
You have not found the secret and the sweep  
Of Music, learned the meaning of the Spring,  
Or known its soft renewals born of love

And sorrow! You have never watched the Sea  
Without some miser's thought of tax and toll,  
Nor bent above the crimson of the rose  
Without some rapine thought of battle-fields!  
Though you should live till your last hair is white.  
And I and this same man you hold in chains  
Should die this moment . . . we have known of life  
And earth far more than you could ever know!

*A cry of approval breaks from the people.*

*Pittacus*

Enough of this! Am I a king of sots?  
Our cities and our veins have come to flow  
With watery wine instead of good red blood!  
We are Sidonian idlers of the night  
Who pay out gold to have our fighting done  
By soldiers bred abroad. We are a land  
That women lead, who strum on droning gut  
And pipe through foolish tubes along our fields  
For years untilled, our roads all left unpaved,  
Our towns and harbors still unfortified.  
We sit and loiter by the walls that lean  
No longer mended, and ungathered wait  
The olive-crops while broken lutes are patched  
And some new song is learned. *Now it must cease!*

*Sappho*

He says, my people, we must sing no more.

*Lesbians*

And breathe and eat no more!

*Phocus (aside)*

And drink no more?

*Pittacus*

I am a patient man, and just, I think.  
I seek to find the light, and sometimes learn  
Through error, and advance through unbelief.  
In things imperial I have been taught  
To heed my people's wishes, and to yield —  
But on one base I stand immovable;  
And now I charge you with its final truth:  
The State, that learns to *act*, endures and lives;  
But one that sits and drones away its nights  
In wine and amorous dreams, *must die of it!*

*Phaon*

Yet here two men would act: and one you hold  
In chains — and you a lover of the strong!  
But let me at him, and I'll leave him there  
As swine-fat for your chariot's axletree!

*Sappho*

Yes, one you hold in chains, and say not why!

*Pittacus*

What I have done was done for Lesbos' sake.

*Sappho (to the people)*

Who has done most for Lesbos, Pittacus  
Or Sappho?

*The People*

Sappho! Sappho!

*Sappho*

Who has taught

You to be happy?

*The People*

Sappho it has been!

*Sappho*

What are my sins, then, that you strike at me  
Thus covertly, and put this man in chains?

*She steps towards Phaon, who turns away from her, with  
a gesture of repudiation.*

*Pittacus (seizing his chance)*

Is this man aught to you?



*Sappho (slowly, after a silence)*

The man is naught to me !

*Pittacus*

Then what he suffers must be naught to you !

*Sappho (dazed)*

And what I suffered, too, is naught to him !

*Pittacus (more assured, realizing Sappho's bewilderment)*

Your sins are those of Lesbos, that must cease.

*Sappho*

And when two lovers kiss, I am the cause ?

*Pittacus*

Enough ! I say you are a blight and shame  
To Lesbos, and this man who lived so deep  
Has lived not in the law. Let him stand forth.  
You are exiled. In seven days a ship  
Shall leave this harbor, going forth at night ;  
And under guard you shall go forth with it  
From Lesbos, and on pain of death return !

*Sappho*

Exiled ! He, Phaon, is exiled from home !

*Pittacus*

The people of this isle shall speak of you  
As of the dead.

*Sappho (rebelliously)*

My people, have you heard?

*Erinna*

O Sappho, say no more, lest some new blow  
Upon you fall!

*Sappho*

Why should I fear a man  
Who stands in fear of me? (*To Erinna*) Now shall  
I taunt  
Him till he sends me forth at Phaon's side!

*Pittacus (nettled into anger)*

What man is this who fears you?

*The people cheer for Sappho, and crowd closer, but the  
hoplites hold them back with drawn swords, circling  
about their Tyrant.*

*Sappho (heatedly)*

'Tis a man  
Named Pittacus, who rules by hate and fear  
And guile — whose guards, see, even now must hold

His subjects back with naked swords! A king  
That Athens calls the Fish-Net Fighter since  
He bore beneath his arm a hidden seine  
And when he fought with Phryno cast his net  
About the stronger man, enmeshed his sword,  
And like a harbor-sweeper, gilled and caught  
And claimed his sickly conquest. . . . We were free  
To choose our lovers and our leaders once,  
And sing when we were happy! Lesbians,  
Here is a man that Pittacus has said  
Shall into exile go! And I have said  
He is unjustly sent *and shall not go!*  
Which shall it be, my people?

*There is a cry or two of "Pittacus" from the waiting  
guards, followed by a roar of exultant "Sappho!"  
"Sappho!" Pittacus pales at the sound, and motions  
to Inarchus.*

*Pittacus*

Guards, stand forth!

(*Aside to Inarchus*) I must act quick, or all can still be  
lost!

This woman is a tigress, lashing bars  
Her fury yet may break. One whip I have  
Reserved until the end, one brand of fire  
To beat her back. You hold in readiness  
This girl, Omaphale. When I shall give  
The signal, let her stand before the crowd!

*Inarchus*

The trull shall be produced !

*Sappho*

Behold the king  
Who casts his people forth without a trial.

*Pittacus (wheeling)*

This woman lies ! No Lesbian has known  
His wrath without just cause !

*Sappho*

Then tell us why  
This man in chains is exiled !

*Pittacus*

Since he sought  
A Lesbian's life.

*Sappho*

That worthy Lesbian  
In turn sought his.

*Pittacus*

Enough of this ; he forced  
The fight upon Alcaeus !

*Sappho*

Lies! All lies!

'Twas *I*, *I* forced this fight upon them both!  
I bent them to my will; I harried them,  
And thrust and drove them at each other's throats!  
I was the arm behind their lifted sword;  
I was the rage behind their cries of hate!  
And you, who talk of justice, you who turn  
To smite the path, and let the serpent go,  
You shrink and wait behind your sullen guard,  
And dare not act!

*Pittacus (enraged)*

Act, act I *shall*! You hear  
This woman's words? From her own mouth she stands  
Accused, arraigned, convicted of her crime!

*Sappho*

Nay, not a woman, but the mangled husk,  
The trampled marc, of one!

*Pittacus*

*You are exiled!*

*A murmur rises from the crowd.*

*Sappho (aside)*

'Tis come, Erinna! He and I shall go  
Out to the lonely places of the world,  
And learn to live again. . . . Great Pittacus,  
I thank you for this banishment! It means  
Release, re-birth, to me! I glory in it!

*Pittacus*

Ay, glory in it, for behold, you win!  
You override my word, and *doubly* win!  
You said this Phaon here should not be sent  
From Lesbos. Then in Lesbos he remains!  
You shall be listened to. . . . Your word is law!  
Release this man, her vow leaves innocent.  
'Tis she who goes from Lesbos, *and at dusk!*  
'Tis she who now shall watch across the spray  
The failing lights, the slowly sinking hills,  
The home that is to her no longer home!

*Sappho*

Alone into the world . . . yet not alone,  
For where Love is shall be no banishment,  
And where Love waits and walks no loneliness!

*Pittacus*

Entombed and confined from this day you are,  
And we shall speak of you as of the dead!

*Sappho*

Oh, Phaon, did you hear? Time was you turned  
And fought for me, at words like this!

*Phaon*

Time was

I loved you, too!

*Sappho*

Time was you loved me, too!

*Phaon*

You flung that love away!

*Sappho*

No; no; it seemed  
Not mine . . . and for the moment I was not  
Myself . . . it drove me unto madness.

*Phaon (raging)*

Drove

You unto madness . . . then unto the man  
You met at midnight in his garden's gloom!  
Is that not true?

*Sappho*

Yes; that is true.

Phaon

You sought

The buyer e'en before the price was paid!

*Sappho*

Stop !

Phaon

Stop? Why should I stop? Have you once stopped  
When passion drove you into other arms? —  
You palmer-worm that feeds on passion, then  
Advances in a night to newer fields!

*Sappho*

Oh . . . Phaon !

Phaon

. . . When it took you forth at night  
To seek Alcaeus, when you whirled your wrath  
About me like a flail, for having known  
A girl, and told you not !

*Sappho (panting)*

This . . . this from you!

I have forgiven much. . . . But now there is  
A bourne past which I cannot go, a depth  
To which I dare not stoop!



*Phaon (bitterly)*

And yet you stooped  
And crept to your Alcaeus!

*Sappho*

Phaon! Stop!  
'Twas love of you, 'twas foolish love of you,  
That took me to him.

*Phaon*

Then must love of him  
Take you from me!

*Sappho*

I love him not!

*Phaon (laughing bitterly)*

You love

Then neither him, nor me, nor any man  
To whom you sold your kisses?

*Sappho*

Oh . . . Enough!

*Phaon*

Enough? More than enough! To me you are  
A corpse corrupting, something hateful grown,  
A woman who has passed away — dead, dead  
To me!

*Sappho*

I . . . dead to you?

*Pittacus (stepping forward)*

And dead you are  
To Lesbos and the people that your days  
Have smirched and slavered, like a serpent's trail!

*Sappho turns, in a mounting frenzy, toward the murmuring crowd, her speech growing ever more and more impassioned.*

You hear, my people, you with whom I sang  
And lived and loved and sorrowed — I shall be  
But as the dead to you?

*Erinna (wailing)*

No; Sappho, no!

*The crowd take up the cry, until it becomes a roar. They advance on the armed hoplites, shouting defiance, with cries of "Sappho!" "Sappho!" The guard close in, grim and silent, ready for the final stand or charge.*

*The Lesbians*

She shall not go!

*Other Lesbians*

No, she is one of us!

*Other Lesbians*

Long live the age of love!

*The Sailors*

Let's fight for it!

*The hoplites are borne back by the force of the crowd,  
Inarchus stands ready, awaiting a sign from Pittacus.*

*A Sailor*

The sea! The sea for Pittacus and all  
His tribe!

*A Lesbian*

Ay, fling them o'er the cliff!

*A Sailor*

Put down

The Tyrant!

*A Lesbian*

Put an end to tyranny!

*Pittacus signals to Inarchus, and the girl Omaphale is  
dragged forward through the crowd. She stands*

*there, white and fragile, a slender barrier between the two bands of combatants. Sappho, remembering, becomes almost statuesque in her immobility. Pittacus, seizing the moment, leaps fearlessly into the crowd.*

*Pittacus*

Is *this* the Kingdom, this the Age of Love  
You usher in? Behold this broken girl,  
A maid deserted for the Queen of Song  
You clamor of; a girl unwed and wronged  
By him, this flashing Phaon of the seas,  
This empty shell, this sabre of a man! . . .

*Sappho*

Cease!

*Pittacus*

. . . Whom she raged and stormed and plotted for . . .

*Sappho*

Cease!

*Pittacus*

. . . Whom she honeyed, humored, played you for . .

*Sappho*

Cease!

*Pittacus*

. . . Whom she bound and blinded with her love,  
Whom she has gripped and held from this wronged girl,  
Whom still she shakes the columns of this State  
To cling to, since our Council has decreed  
That Phaon and this girl Omaphale  
In public shall be wed, as is the law!

*Erinna*

Wait, Sappho — plead with Phaon; plead with him  
For but a word, to make this folly clear!

*Sappho*

I, plead with Phaon? And relate how I  
Have loved him hopelessly, and once forgave  
His wandering, and wooed him back to her,  
From exile, and would sing their marriage ode,  
And humbly ask a word on why he cleaves  
To earlier lovers? . . . Oh, this is the end!

*Sappho's fury now amounts to a white heat as she speaks.  
It disregards the issue at hand; it disregards the  
people awaiting her word; it is the last bitter cry  
of a woman broken by fate.*

I hate this man called Phaon, hate him . . . hate  
Him as the living hate the thought of Hell!

And where he goes, or whom of all his loves  
He weds . . . is naught to me! Go, marry him,  
Meek, white-faced child . . . and learn how men are  
false,  
And how the world is built on lies . . . and how  
This thing called Love is but a hollow lie,  
And Hope is but a lie, and Happiness  
The crowning lie of all your world of lies!

*Erinna and Atthis, on either side, support her quivering body. Quickly the disordered guard re-forms into a solid line. The people fall back, murmuring but bewildered, while Sappho starts up, involuntarily, as Phaon is crowded back and turns away with Omaphale at his side.*

*Sappho (weakly)*

Yet Phaon, it was all for you . . . for you!  
Oh, do not go without a look, a word!

*Pittacus, at this cry of the humbled and broken woman, is sure of his victory, and at once signals to Inarchus and his men. Phaon hesitates and turns to Sappho, but the levelled spears of the guard are before him.*

*Pittacus*

This last word must be *mine!* It calls the chains  
To bind this woman, who all time is dead  
To Lesbos! Guards, surround the prisoner.

*Sappho, rising and towering above them in her last supreme outburst of indignation and passion, ecstatic in her rage.*

I, dead to Lesbos! Tyrant, I am one  
Who broods and wanders here as long as waves  
Wash on your island's shore! Drive back the sea, —  
But dream not you have driven Sappho forth  
To be forgotten! Where a lover waits  
Beside a twilit grove, I shall be there!  
I, where he woos a woman, *I* shall breathe  
Out through his lips! Yes, where a singing girl  
Goes with her heavy pitcher to the spring  
At earliest dawn, I shall beside her walk,  
And at the well-curb I shall wait for her!  
When sailors lift their sails, 'tis I shall breathe  
Across the waves to them! When man and maid  
Are joined in one, my voice shall chant their hymn!  
And where the olive-pickers in the sun  
Together sing, I shall be in their midst!  
And where a net is dipped, the beryl waves  
Shall break in little murmurs with my name!  
And where the goat-herd tends his flock, and croons

The songs that once were mine, and where the men  
Who shape the timbers in the shipyard's din  
Make labor glad with music, *I shall live!*  
Yes, where a youth still loves, a girl still waits,  
*I, Sappho, I shall not have passed away!*

*Curtain*



## ACT FOUR

*The scene is the same as in Act One, on the cliffs of Leucadia. It is one year later, close to the hour of sunset. The rising curtain discloses Erinna and an old Soothsayer, muffled and cloaked. As the curtain goes up he is stooping over the bronze fire-basin set in marble, stained and blackened with smoke. Erinna sits watching.*

*Erinna*

But are you man or woman?

*Soothsayer*

Neither. Man

I used to be! But much of me has died!

*Erinna*

How long have you been blind?

*Soothsayer (bitterly)*

It seems to me

That I have been a blind man from my birth.

*Erinna*

Yet by the drifting flame and flight of birds  
You have foretold the future, and worked cures  
Where other charms have failed?

*Soothsayer*

Ay, by the flight  
Of birds, by smoke, by cocks devouring corn,  
By winds, by meteors, by red-hot iron,  
By divers entrails, and the drip of wax  
In water, I have many wonders worked!

*He gropes and feels about the altar, nervously.*

What is it, maiden, that you wish to know?

*Erinna*

First tell me, what am I?

*Soothsayer (peering into space)*

I seem to see  
A thrush that crouches by a nightingale,  
Yet neither sings.

*Erinna*

But once I used to sing.

*Soothsayer*

You are a singer, eh? When I was young  
I knew a man of Leucas who would take  
A hollow shin-bone pierced with many vents  
And play us cunning tunes. In Lesbos, too,  
I heard a girl called Sappho sing . . .

*Erinna*

Heard Sappho!

*Soothsayer*

Ay, the Tenth Muse after whom  
The older Nine once walked!

*Erinna*

Yes, yes; I know —  
Sir, it is for a sister that I ask  
This augury.

*Soothsayer*

What has befallen her?

*Erinna*

She is sick  
In heart.

*Soothsayer*

Aught else?

*Erinna*

And most unhappy.

*Soothsayer*

Ah,

Unhappy! Has she loved, or has she known  
A man unworthy her?

*Erinna*

Such man she knew!  
And now the loneliness of all the world  
Weighs on her soul and turns her troubled dreams  
To olden days and dark imaginings.

*Soothsayer*

And now her love is dead?

*Erinna*

That would I know.  
She mourns by day, and never speaks his name,  
But in the night she weeps and cries to him  
And through her dreams his name forever sounds.  
Yet when she wakes her heart seems dead again,  
And hour by hour she broods beside the sea.

*Soothsayer*

Thinks she this lover dead?

*Erinna*

He is not dead.

*Soothsayer*

How could she know he is not dead?

*Erinna*

I sent

To Lesbos and made sure he lives.

*Soothsayer*

And when

You told her of it?

*Erinna*Then she neither wept  
Nor laughed nor spake!*Soothsayer*

She must have suffered deep!

*Erinna*O tell me how much longer it will last,  
And what will come of it!*Soothsayer*Take then this seed  
And cast it on the flame.

*Erinna*

What seed is it?

*Soothsayer*

Sea-fennel mixed with myrrh. But was it cast?

*Erinna goes to the altar and casts the seed on the smouldering fire.*

*Erinna*

'Tis on the flame.

*Soothsayer*

The smoke . . . how does it rise?

*Erinna*

It rises in a column, thin and straight.

*Soothsayer*

And still so rises?

*Erinna*

No . . . for now it drifts  
And wavers, in a broken cloud.

*Soothsayer*

Enough!

Now take this sparrow. Hold it in your hand,  
And face the east. . . . Now let the bird go free!

*Erinna*

'Tis free! 'Tis gone!

*Soothsayer*

How has it flown?

*Erinna*

It flew

Beyond the cliffs! 'Tis lost within the Sea!

What can such things portend?

*The Soothsayer is silent, wrapt in thought.*

What do they mean?

*Soothsayer*

It means good news, and bad. . . . Go you and bring  
This woman to me . . . I must speak with her!

*Erinna*

Then gently, speak to her the darker news;  
Oh, give her peace — for she has need of it!

*(Exit)*

*Soothsayer (disclosing himself as Phaon)*

This is the hour where life and death divide,  
Where all the rivers of the world hold back  
And wait some new beginning . . . or the end!

O Aphrodite, you who leaned across  
My oar with luminous eyes and filled the gloom  
With glory, help me, help me in this hour!

*Sappho enters, slowly, with Erinna. Sappho is robed in white, and on her hair is a heavy crown of dark violets, making paler her pale face. She does not look towards Phaon — her dreamy gaze is bent on the Sea.*

*Sappho*

What sail is that? I thought I knew each ship  
That passes here!

*Erinna*

'Tis one from Lesbos come.

*Sappho*

From Lesbos! Lesbos! O how frail a thing  
To face so many seas, to creep so far  
From home! I wonder if its timbers thrill  
And ache for Lesbos now? If through its keel  
Some wordless anguish burns, when e'er the name  
Of Lesbos comes to it . . . as in my heart!

*Erinna*

This prophet fares from Lesbos, and would speak  
With you alone!

*(Exit)*



*Sappho slowly turns and studies the soothsayer, who remains cloaked. The sunlight falls clear and gold on the two figures.*

*Sappho (murmurs)*

This sail from Lesbos fares !

*Phaon*

Ay, from the land that cast Alcaeus out,  
A broken exile, into Sicily;  
The land that once was known as Sappho's isle,  
And shall again be hers.

*Sappho*

What man are you?

*Phaon*

One who would wait and seek you out beyond  
The uttermost unkeeled domains of Night!

*Sappho*

Who . . .

*Phaon*

One who comes to bear you home again,  
Still crowned with ivy and wild olive as  
You came from Athens!

*Sappho*

Phaon!

*Phaon*

Sappho!

*Sappho*

Oh,  
Why have you followed me? Why have you come  
To this grey land that is my Underworld  
Of ghosts and dreams?

*Phaon*

To take you home again!

*Sappho*

It is too late!

*Phaon*

Nay, you have been recalled —  
I bear the Lesbian Council's word to bring  
You out of exile! Lesbos cried for you  
Till Pittacus himself was forced to bow  
Unto their clamor! Athens also rose  
And said you should return. . . . And I,  
Who loved you once, and love you evermore,  
Now plead with you to come.

*Sappho (musingly)*

It is too late!

Dear hills of sun and gloom and green . . . soft hills  
That I shall see no more!

*Phaon*

Nay, Sappho, come —

They wait and ask for you, but not as I.  
They beg the glad bird-throated girl they crowned  
With violets, the Voice they listened to  
At twilight when the brief day's work was done.  
I beg the woman who made all my world  
A dusk of warmth and rapture . . . her to whom  
My lonely heart has yearned!

*Sappho (looking up)*

Omaphale —

Where waits Omaphale? Where are the loves  
You laughed and whispered to this many a year?

*Phaon*

There is but one great love in any life,  
The rest are ghosts, to mock its memories.  
All through the weary months I wanted you,  
Cried out for you, and had to come to you!

*Sappho (slowly)*

And had to come to me! And wanted me!

*Phaon*

Great wrong I wrought you, but I was deceived,  
And deeply I have suffered!

*Sappho*

Suffered? When?

*Phaon*

The loss of you . . . the ache and emptiness  
Of one who knew all love, and is denied;  
The torture of the days that are no more;  
The terror and the anguish born of ways  
That one great love illumed, that one lost voice  
Still like a fading lute with sorrow haunts!  
Turn not away . . . look at me, Sappho. . . . Come,  
Come back with me where still the singing girls  
Laugh, ruddy-ankled, round the Lesbian vats,  
And every hill and lowland is your home,  
And deep throats from the laden galleys sing  
By night of love and women as of old!

*Sappho (still wrapt in thought, wistfully)*

How far away those twilight voices are!

*Phaon*

But still they chant your words, and wait for you,  
And down the solemn Dorian scale the pipes  
Wander and plead, and note by note still wake  
With soft Æolian rapture. Still come back  
Where droning flute and harp shall drowse away  
This wordless hunger that has paled your face,  
Where every lover knows your music still,  
And every meadow keeps your voice alive,  
Where lonely cliffs reach out their arms for you . . . .  
Come back, and be at rest !

*Sappho*

O island home  
Where we were happy once !

*Phaon*

And shall again  
Be happy, where the golden vetch is thick  
Along the cliffs, and cool the olive-groves,  
And all the shadowy fir-lands and the hills  
Lean tender purple to Æolia's coast,  
And all the harbor-lights still wait and watch,  
Like weary eyes, for you to come again !

*Sappho*

Yes, well I know them where their paths of gold  
Once lay like wavering music on the sea !

*Phaon*

And there like wine made sweet with honey, life  
Shall flow reluctantly!

*Sappho*

O sea-washed home  
Where we, so long ago, were happy once!

*Phaon*

I brought a sorrow to that home, I know —  
But I have suffered for it, and have learned  
How all the paths of all the oceans lead  
To you — you — you!

*Sappho*

Oh speak not thus to me —  
It is too late, my Phaon.

'Twas your hand  
That crushed the silver goblet of my heart,  
And now the wine is spilt; the page is read,  
And from the tale the earlier glory gone;  
The torch has failed amid the falling dusk,  
The dream has passed, and rapture is a word  
Unknown to my sad heart, and music sounds  
Mournful as evening bells on lonely seas.

*Phaon*

But Lesbos calls, and still you will not hear;  
Our home is waiting, and you will not come!

*Sappho*

Lightly you loved me, Phaon, long ago;  
And there were other arms unknown to me  
That folded over you, though none more fond  
Than mine that fell so wing-like round your head.  
And there were other eyes that drooped as mine  
Despairingly before your pleading mouth.

*Phaon*

“I have loved oft and lightly that, at last,  
I might love you!” Can you remember not?

*Sappho*

But many were the nights I wept, and learned  
How sorrowful is all divided love,  
How we who give too often . . . *never give*,  
How one voice must be lost, and being lost,  
May be remembered most.

*Phaon*

But you alone  
It was, pale-throated woman, that I loved!  
Through outland countries have I seen your eyes,  
And like a flower through all my perilous ways  
Your face has gone before me, and your voice  
Beyond dim islands and mysterious seas

Has drawn me to you, calling from the dunes  
Where Summer once hung low above our hands,  
And we, as children, dreamed to dreaming waves,  
And all the world seemed made for you and me !

*Sappho*

It is too late; the wine of life is spilt,  
The shore-lark of our youth has flown away,  
And all the Summer vanished.

One brief year  
Ago I could have gone to any home,  
A wanderer with you o'er troubled seas;  
And slept beside your fire content, and fared  
Still on again between green hills and strange,  
And echoing valleys where the eagled pines  
Were full of gloom, and many waters sang, —  
Still on to some low plain or highland coign  
Remembered not of men, where we had made  
Our home amid the music of the Spring,  
Letting life's twilight sands glide thro' the glass  
So golden-slow, so glad, no plaintive chime  
Could e'er be blown to us across the dusk,  
From Life's grey towers of many-tongued regret !  
Then I had been most happy at your side,  
Easing my exiled heart with homely thoughts  
And turning these sad hands to simple things.  
In our low oven that should gleam by night



Baking my wheaten loaves, and with my wheel  
Spinning the milky wool, and light of heart  
Dipping my brazen pitcher in the spring  
That bubbled by our door.

And then, perchance,  
(O anodyne for all dark-memored days!)  
To feel the touch of little hands, and hold  
A child — your child and mine — close on this breast,  
And croon it songs and tunes quite meaningless  
Unto the bosom where no milk has been —  
Yes, fonder than the poolside lutings low  
Of dreaming frogs to their Arcadian god!  
There had I borne to you a sailor folk,  
A tawny-haired swart brood of boys, as brave  
As mine old Phaon was, cubbed by the sea  
And buffeted by wind and brume; and I,  
On winter nights when all the waves were black,  
In musing wise had told them tales and dreams  
Of Lesbian days, e'en though the words should sound  
To my remembering heart, so far from home,  
As mournful as the wind to imprisoned men;  
— Old tales they should re-tell long ages hence  
Unto their children's children by the fire  
When loud the dark South-West that brings the rain  
Moaned round their walls! And in more happy days  
By some pale golden summer moon, when dim  
The waters were — mysterious eves of dusk  
And music, stars, and silence and regret —

Singing into my saddened heart should come  
Soft thoughts, to bloom in words as roses break  
And blow and wither and are gone; and we  
Reckless of time, should waken not and find  
Our hearts grown old, but evermore live on  
As do the stars and Earth's untroubled trees,  
While seasons came, like birds, and went again, —  
Though Greece and her green islands were no more,  
And all her marbled power should pass away,  
And empires, like an arch, should crumble down,  
And kings should live and die, and one by one  
Like flames their lofty cities should go out!

*Phaon*

Your voice still falls on my dry heart like dew!  
I hear you speak, and know not what you say,  
For like a bell your name swings through my dreams!  
And all my being throbs and cries for you!  
Come back with me; but come, and I will speak  
A thousand gentle words for each poor tear  
That dimmed your eyes! Come back, and I will crown  
Your days with love so enduring it shall light  
The eternal stars to bed!

*Sappho*

Ask me no more, —  
I warmed the whimpering whelps of Passion once  
In this white breast of mine — but, now, full grown,

They seem to stalk me naked through the world!  
Too fond I now should bend unto the fierce  
Necessity of bliss, and in each glow  
Of golden anguish yearn forever toward  
Some quiet gloom where we can never walk!  
These feet of mine have known too many homes  
To claim one door, and close it on the world!  
This bosom now is hot as Ætna's, torn  
And seared with fires that long since passed away!  
Yet had you only loved me, as I asked —  
How humble I had been, how I had tried  
From this poor broken twilight to rebuild  
The Dream, and from its ashes to restore  
The Temple!

*Phaon*

But I loved you then, and love  
You now! The torn plume of the wing I take,  
The ruined rose, and all the empty cruse;  
Here I accept the bitter with the sweet,  
The autumnal sorrow with the autumnal gold;  
Tears shall go unregretted, and much pain  
Gladly I take, if grief, in truth, and you  
Can still come hand in hand to me.

*Sappho*

No! No!

For good were life if every lonely bough  
Could lure again its vanished nightingale!

— If all that luting music of first love  
Could be recalled down years grown desolate !  
Lightly they sing who love and are beloved ;  
And men shall lightly listen ; but the heart  
That has been broken and must hide its wound  
In music, is remembered through the years !  
It was not much I asked in those old days —  
For men have wider missions than we know.  
'Tis not, thro' all their moods, they hunger for  
Our poor pale faces. As a flame at sea  
They seek us in the fog, and then forget.  
'Tis when by night the battle-noise has died ;  
'Tis when the port is won, and wind and storm  
Are past ; 'tis when the heart for solace aches ;  
'Tis when they stop to rest in darkling woods,  
Or under alien stars the fire is lit,  
And when regret makes deep some idle hour.  
Then would we have our name sing throbbingly  
Thro' some beloved heart, soft as a bird, —  
And swing with it — swing sweet as silver bells !  
Not all your crowded day I hoped to see  
You turn to me : but when some little flower  
Shone through the dust and lured a softer mood,  
I hoped your troubled eyes would seek my eyes !  
And in those days that I first cried for you  
And went un comforted, had you returned,  
I could have washed your careless feet with tears,  
And unto you still grown, and gone thro' sun

And gloom beside you, and still in the bliss  
Of motherhood and most mysterious birth  
Forgotten ancient wrongs!

*Phaon*

Why brood on things  
Turned into dust and ashes long ago,  
When softly dawn by golden dawn, and eve  
By opal eve, Earth whispers: Life is ours!

*Sappho*

Once I could listen to you; e'er you go; —

*Phaon*

And still you bid me go?

*Sappho*

Oh, had you gone  
While still the glory of my dreaming fell  
Like sunlight round you, — had you even died,  
I should have loved you now, as women love  
The wonder and the silence of the West  
When with sad eyes they breathe a last farewell  
To where the black ships go so proudly out, —  
Watching with twilit faces by the Sea  
Till down some golden rift the fading sails  
Darken and glow and pale amid the dusk,  
And gleam again, and pass into the gloom!

*Phaon*

Then once you loved me! Let me know no more!  
The cry of that old love shall lead you back  
To me, and make us one!

*Sappho*

Nay, Home I go —  
Home, Home afar, where unknown seas forlorn  
On gloomy towers and darkling bastions foam,  
And lonely eyes look out for one dim sail  
That never comes, and men have said there is  
No sun. — And though I go forth soon no fear  
Shall cling to me, since I a thousand times  
Ere this have died a little day by day;  
And sun by sun the grave insatiable  
Has taken to its gloom some happier grace,  
And hour by hour some glory old engulfed,  
And left me like a house untenanted.

*Phaon*

No more of this! I need you; still turn back  
With me, and let one riotous flame of bliss  
Forever burn away these withered griefs,  
As fire eats clean the autumn mountain-side;  
For all this sweet sad-eyed dissuasiveness  
Endears like dew the flower of final love!

*Sappho (abstracted)*

— Yes, I have died ere this a thousand times;  
For on the dusky borderlands of dream,  
Across the twilight of dim summer dawns  
Before the hooves of pearl throbbed down the wind,  
And listening to the birds amid green boughs  
Where tree and hill and field were touched with fire,  
— Hearing, yet hearing not, thro' all the thin  
Near multitudinous lament of Dawn's  
Low rustling leaves, stirred by some opal wing, —  
Oft have I seemed to feel my soul come home!  
And faint and strange on my half-wakened ears  
Would fall the flute and pipe of early birds;  
And strange the odor of the opening flowers;  
And strange the world would lie, and stranger still  
The quiet rain along the glimmering grass:  
And Earth, sad with so many memories  
Of bliss, and beautiful with vague regrets,  
Would take on poignant glories, strange as death!

*Phaon*

What is this dim-eyed madness and dark talk  
Of death?

*Sappho*

Hush! I have seen Death pass a hand  
Along old wounds, and they have ached no more!

And with one little word lull pain away,  
And heal long-wasting tears!

*Phaon*

But these soft lips  
Were made not for the touch of mold!

*Sappho*

Time was  
I thought Death stern, and scattered at his door  
My dearest roses, that his feet might come  
And softly go!

*Phaon*

This body white was made  
Not for the grave, — this flashing-wonder of  
The hand for hungry worms!

*Sappho*

Oh, quiet as  
Soft rain on water shall it seem, and sad  
Only as life's most dulcet music is,  
And dark as but a bride's first dreaded night  
Is dark — mild, mild as mirrored stars!

But you, —  
You will forget me, Phaon; there the sting!  
The sorrow of the grave is not its green,



Nor yet the salt tear on its violet;  
It is the years that bring the grey neglect,  
When tangled grasses smooth the lessening mound,  
When leaf by leaf the tree of sorrow wanes,  
And on the urn unseen the tarnish comes,  
And tears are not so bitter as they were!  
Time sings so low to our bereaved ear,  
So softly breathes, that, bud by falling bud,  
The garden of our Grief all empty lies,  
And unregretted dips the languid oar  
Of Charon thro' the gloom, and then is gone!

*Phaon*

Red-lipped and breathing woman, made for love,  
How can you talk of Death, or dream that one  
Who ever looked upon you can forget?

*Sappho*

You will forget me, though you would or not!  
Yes, in some other Spring when other lips  
Let fall my name, you will remember not! —  
Yet come and let me look into your eyes,  
Thus quietly, as women view the dead,  
And dream of far-off things! As in farewell,  
Still let me feel your hand about my hand!

*Phaon*

Your touch burns thro' my blood like fire. You have  
Not changed. Still must I kiss the heavy rose  
Of your red mouth!

*Sappho*

No, not till Death has leaned  
And kissed it white as this white cliff, and robed  
This body for its bridegroom!

*Phaon*

Honey-pale  
And passion-worn you seem, and I am blind  
With looking on your beauty. Sappho, come —  
Come close into my arms.

*Sappho*

It is too late;  
Forth to a sterner lover must I fare!

*Phaon*

Mine flamed your first love, and shall glow your last!

*Sappho*

Then meet this One, and know!

*Phaon*

The hounds of Hell

And Aidoneus himself —

*Sappho*

Hush !

*Phaon*

*You I seek !*

The cadence of your voice enraptures me,  
The very breathing of your bosom turns  
My blood to sweeping fire, and leaves me faint  
With longing, makes me flash and burn with love !  
And still you would elude me — but this arm  
Is strong, and I shall know no other god —

*Sappho*

Cease ! son of passion !

*Phaon*

Not until these arms,  
Shall hold and fold about you, not until —

*Sappho*

By all the hours you darkened, by the love  
You crushed and left embittered, hear me speak !

*Phaon (bitterly)*

Thus women change — and in their time forget !

*Sappho*

There lies the sorrow — if we *could* forget !  
For one brief hour you gave me all the love  
That women ask, and then with cruel hands  
Set free the singing voices from the cage,  
And tore the glory from the waiting rose;  
And through life's empty garden still I dreamed  
And called for Love, and walked unsatisfied.  
Love! Love! 'Tis we who lose it know it best !  
By day a fire and wonder, and by night  
A wheeling star that sinks in Mystery.  
Love! Love! It is the blue of bluest skies;  
The farthest green of waters touched with sun !  
It is the calm of moonlight and of leaves,  
And yet the troubled music of the Sea !  
It is the frail original of faith,  
The timorous thing that seems afraid of light,  
Yet, loosened, sweeps the world, consuming time  
And tinsel empires, grim with blood and war !  
It is the voiceless want and loneliness  
Of blighted lands made wonderful with rain !  
Regret it is, and song, and wistful tears;  
The rose upon the tomb of afterthought,  
The only wine of life, that on the lip

Of Thirst turns not to ashes! Change and time  
And sorrow kneel to it, for at its touch  
The world is beautiful . . . the world is *born*!

*Phaon*

Your words were ever tuned to madden men,  
And I am drunk with these sweet pleadings, soft  
As voices over many waters blown!  
And thus you come to me against your will!

*Sappho*

Hear me, for by those gods you fear the most  
There is a fire within me burns away  
All pity, and some Hate, half-caged, may eat  
Thro' its last bar!

*Phaon*

Not till your mouth's  
Sad warmth droops unto mine!

*Sappho*

Yours once I was,  
And once I watched you spurn and tread me down  
And long amid my perished roses lay,  
Broken with sorrow, but still held my peace!  
But now I warn you that the tide has turned!

Touch nevermore these hands, for my torn heart  
Is desperate, and given not to words!  
Quite humble have I been, and duly spake  
My lips as you once asked that they should speak!  
But now this empty husk from which you drained  
Life's darkest wine, shall die in its own way.  
Yes, yes; as water sighs and whispers through  
Some hollow-throated urn, so now through me  
Shall steal contentment. Touch me not! Stand back!  
Or if you will, locked arm in reckless arm,  
Come with me, down, down to this crawling Deep!

*Phaon*

What madness can this be?

*Sappho*

The ocean waves  
Are softer with their dead, and autumn winds  
More kindly are with leaves, than mortal love  
With women, for it kills and buries not.

*Phaon*

You murmur of the dead, when warm and quick  
You breathe before me, and bewilder thought!  
With but the wine-like rapture of your voice  
You make me desperate!

*Sappho*

Nay, touch me not!

*Phaon*

You shall come with me, Sappho! I alone  
Dare not go back. I carry in my breast  
The edict of the Council. It commands  
I bring you safely home, and should I fail  
A thousand hands would beat me to the sea.  
But in this breast I bear a second scroll,  
A more imperious message, writ and sealed  
Of Love itself. I shall no longer be  
Denied or trifled with, though I must tear  
You like a rooted flower from where you wait;  
Though I must take you, like a fluttered bird,  
And bruise you in the taking! Come with me!

*Sappho*

Lay not unholy hands upon the dead.

*Phaon*

Yes, I shall bear you forth, as from a wall  
That totters or a chamber wrapped in flame!

*He seizes her resisting body. His strength overpowers  
her, and she lies back in his arms, panting. There  
she catches sight of the knife in his belt.*

*Sappho*

Nay, Phaon, I shall go, if you but wait —

*Phaon*

Too long I waited !

*Sappho*

Take me not by force,  
Oh, not by force now, Phaon ! Let me come  
Quite willingly, made ready for your arms —

*Phaon*

I shall release you not !

*Sappho*

But let me breathe  
One brief farewell, one broken last good-by  
To all my older life. . . . Then you can come  
And take me where you will, and not a word  
Of anger or lament shall pass my lips !

*She forces him about so that they face the sea.*

Then I shall go almost without regret ;  
For ghost-like even now I am ; these eyes  
Wave-worn as Leucothea's eyes must seem,  
And I am tired, and it is good to sleep.  
So alone, sad Mother Ocean, let me rest ;



Alone, grey Mother, take me in your arms —  
Whose sorrow must have been as deep as mine,  
Who loved in times I know not of, and lost,  
And still must murmur of it night and day  
Along your mournful-noted shores!

*Phaon*

What gods  
Are these you call upon in ecstasy?

*Sappho*

I call not on your gods, or mine. For they  
Live high above our Earth, and scarce would know  
The odor of my incense, or how white  
My piteous altars stood! Too like the Moon  
That looks so disimpassioned over men  
And their tumultuous cities crowned with pain,  
Smile down the gods on our tight-lipped despairs!  
Yet far I am from home to go, and far  
From any voice to comfort me beyond  
The cypress twilight and the hemlock gloom!  
But take me, Mournful Mother, while I feel  
Burn through my blood this bitter ecstasy!  
Oh, take me, Mother Ocean, in your arms,  
And let the cooling waters lave and wash  
All sorrow from my eyes and rock the pain  
From my poor heart!

*Phaon*

Upon my heart your heart  
Shall rock in weary slumber and forget  
These ghostly sorrows!

*He crushes her half-passive body still closer.*

Give me of your lips  
As once, on Leucate, so long ago!

*Sappho*

Oh, free me, Phaon!

*Phaon*

Not until you lie  
At rest, and willingly, within my arms!

*Sappho*

Oh, free me, but a moment!

*Phaon*

Nevermore!

*Sappho*

This is the costliest last kiss of all  
Your life . . . and mine!

*Phaon*

I care not what it costs,  
It crowns me with a peace — above the gods!

*She shudders, but lies passive in his arms, her own creeping about him. Her hand falls to his knife, which she withdraws, raises, and sinks deep in his side. His arms droop away, he crumbles down at her feet, without a word, dead. She scarcely moves as she gazes at the body. The two figures are bathed in the full golden light of the sunset. The voice of Erinna calls from the distance. Sappho turns with a haunted look, raises her arms, and leaps into the sea. Faintly, from the harbor beyond the cliff sounds the chords of "The Sailors' Hymn to Sunset," as the light slowly pales and passes.*

*Curtain*

## THE THREE VOICES

WHEN the fire sinks flame by flame  
And the shadows, Dear, grow long,  
Shall I turn for praise or blame  
To the Brazen-Throated Throng?

When the last poor deed is done,  
Shall I look, O Good and True,  
To the old friends one by one,  
The Silver-Throated Few?

Nay, all that I strove to do,  
However it end, was done  
For You and the love of You,  
The Golden-Throated One!

# SAPPHO IN LEUCADIA

BY

ARTHUR STRINGER



BOSTON

LITTLE, BROWN, AND COMPANY

1907

2000-1900-1900  
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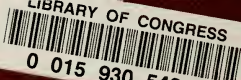






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